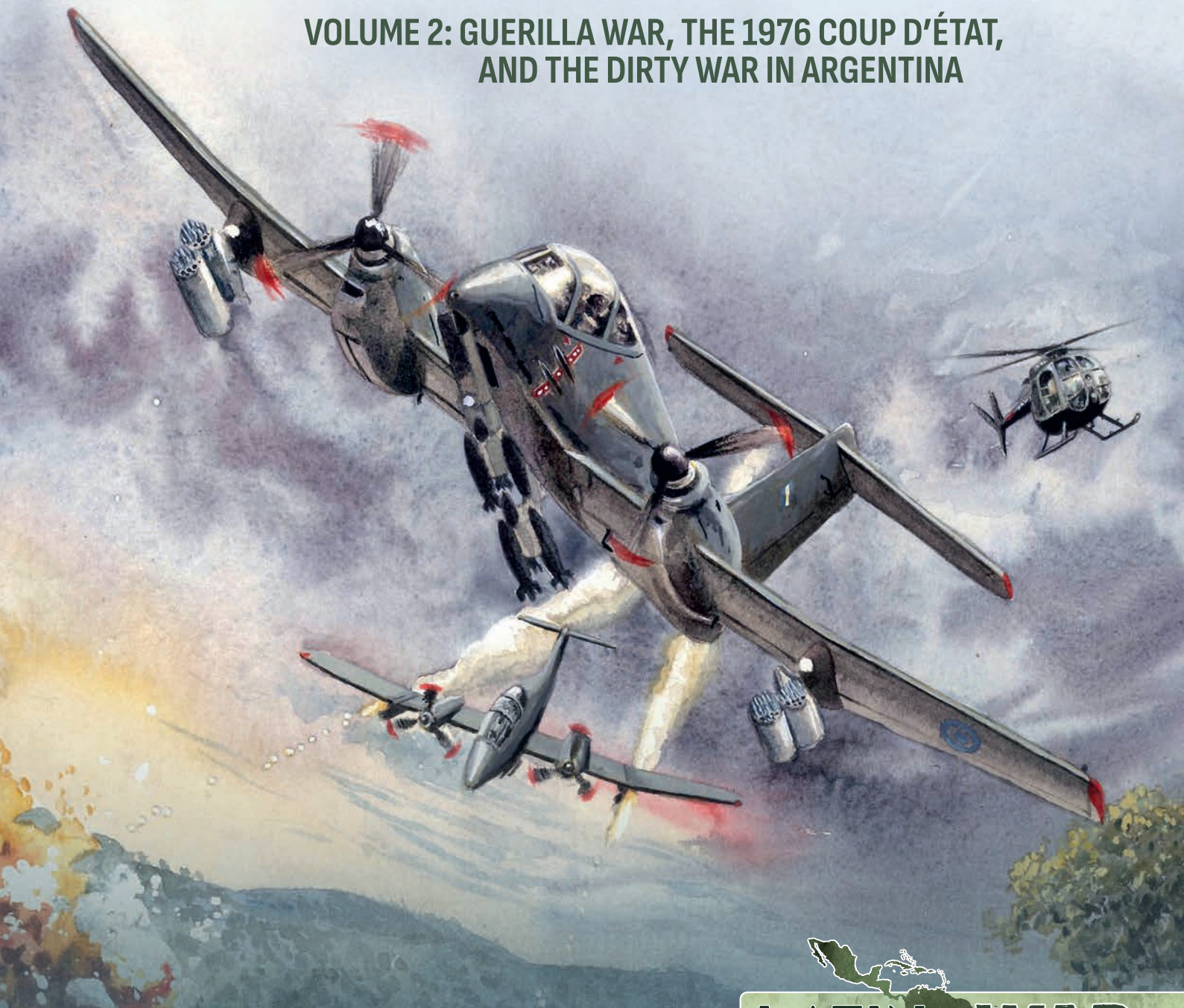
OPERATIVO INDEPENDENCIA

VOLUME 2: GUERILLA WAR, THE 1976 COUP D'ÉTAT, AND THE DIRTY WAR IN ARGENTINA



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Cover artwork:
A pair of Argentine *Fuerza Aérea Argentina* IA.58 Pucará attack aircraft firing rockets and their guns at guerrilla targets in the Tucumán jungle. Behind, an FAA Hughes 369 helicopter acts as forward air controller. (Artwork by Renato Dalmaso © Helion & Company 2024)

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Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAA	*Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*/Argentine Anti-communist Alliance (Triple A)
AB	Air Base
AE	*Aviación del Ejército*/Army Aviation
AMIA	*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*/Argentine Israelite Mutual Association
ARA	*Armada de la República Argentina*/Argentine Navy
CGT	*Confederación General del Trabajo*/General Confederation of Labour
EA	*Ejército Argentino*/Argentine Army
EAM	*Escuela de Aviación Militar*/Military Aviation School
ERP	*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*/People's Revolutionary Army
ESMA	*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*/Navy Mechanics School
FAA	*Fuerza Aérea Argentina*/Argentine Air Force
FT	*Fuerza de Tarea*/Task Force
HMG	heavy machine gun
JCR	*Junta Coordinadora Revolucionaria* or *Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria*/Revolutionary Coordinating Board
MIR	*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*/ Revolutionary Left Movement
NCO	non-commissioned officer
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PRT	*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*/ Workers' Revolutionary Party
RI	*Regimiento de Infantería*/Infantry Regiment
RIM	*Regimiento de Infantería de Montaña*/Mountain Infantry Regiment
TEA	*Tropas Especiales de Agitación*/Special Agitation Troops (*Montoneros*)
TEI	*Tropas Especiales de Infantería*/Special Infantry Troops (*Montoneros*)
UCR	*Unión Cívica Radical*/Radical Civic Union (Political Party)

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INTRODUCTION

Operativo Independencia (Operation Independence) was a massive and effective military response ordered by the constitutional government of Argentine President María Estela Martínez de Perón (known as Isabel de Perón) through Decree No. 261/75 of 5 February 1975. Its objective was to neutralise and/or annihilate guerrilla terrorism in the country, especially two organisations, the Marxist-Leninist People's Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, ERP) and the left-wing Perónist group called the *Montoneros* (see Volume 1).

By 1975, the situation with the guerrillas in Argentina had become untenable, with them having infiltrated factories, workers' unions, schools, universities and even the Federal Police and armed forces, looking for supporters who could provide key information for the various attacks they carried out, causing the loss of hundreds of innocent lives. In the mid-1970s, these guerrilla groups had some 5,000 organised, armed, equipped and trained combatants and some 20,000 peripheral militants who were part of the logistics chain or were simply sympathisers. Some sources even claim higher numbers, with 30,000 or so fighters and another 150,000 supporters.[1] Even such numbers represented barely 0.5 percent of the population and had the vast majority of the country against them. The subversives had the support of the Soviet Union, Cuba and the communist countries of Eastern Europe, along with left-wing organisations in France, Italy, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden.

The objective of the insurgents was to create chaos in the country to prepare for the coming of their leader, Juan Domingo Perón. When the military governments gave way to free elections for Argentina, with the Perónist candidate Héctor Cámpora winning in 1973, guerrilla activity did not decrease but rather increased significantly. Cámpora belonged to the Perónist left and was greatly influenced by his two *Montonero* sons, with key government positions held by *Montoneros*. That cost him a severe reprimand from the Perónist leader, and when General Perón assumed the presidency, he declared these groups illegal and launched an armed struggle against them. There was also the Perónist right wing in the shape of the General Confederation of Labour (*Confederación General del Trabajo*, CGT) and later the Triple A (*Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*, Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, AAA) led by the Minister of Social Welfare, José López Rega, which was in charge of avenging the murders and kidnappings of trade unionists by Marxist groups, especially between 1973 and 1975.

General Perón did not live long after his return, and it was his wife Isabel, the Vice-President, who, upon assuming the presidency, had to face the serious problem of the guerrillas. Although her government ordered *Operativo Independencia*, she too would not see the end of

this story, which would occur during the rule of another military government, one led by Lieutenant General Videla, towards the end of the 1970s.

Operativo Independencia, under which the nation was essentially under a state of siege, allowed the police and military forces of Argentina to resort to actions that in later years would be considered 'dirty' and violating human rights. It was not a conventional war, the Federal Police and armed forces resorting to unorthodox methods to fight their enemy, including illegal arrests, torture to obtain vital information on the guerrillas' whereabouts, 'disappearances' (summary executions without trial) and clandestine burials in mass graves, in a bid to counteract similar actions carried out by the terrorists. Argentina was also the epicentre of the 'Condor Plan', in complicity with other regional military governments, and the concept of 'dirty war' was even exported to Central America to fight against local guerrilla groups.

Unfortunately, since the return of democracy and civil governments in Argentina from 1983 onward, as a kind of revenge, only part of the story has ever been told, with the guerrillas and their sympathisers appearing as 'victims', being portrayed as only idealistic youngsters who confronted the 'evil' military and police. In fact, subversive organisations were responsible for 21,655 terrorist attacks between 1962 and 1979. A large segment of society has forgotten the pain and suffering caused by the guerrillas to many Argentine families. Subsequent *Justicialist* (Perónist) governments have even erected monuments with the names of the guerrillas and missing persons and given official pardon to many of them.

The text of this volume is based on official archives of the Argentine Army (*Ejército Argentino*), Navy (*Armada de la República Argentina*, ARA), Air Force (*Fuerza Aérea Argentina*, FAA) and Federal Police, although guerrilla sources were also consulted to cross-reference data, given that the latter can be unreliable.

1
OPERATIVO INDEPENDENCIA 1975–1976

On 9 July 1816, the Congress of Tucumán, made up of representatives of the United Provinces of Río de la Plata, declared independence from the Spanish Crown. The 1975 campaign to neutralise or annihilate the guerrillas was therefore called *Operativo Independencia*, because it was carried out in the province of Tucumán.

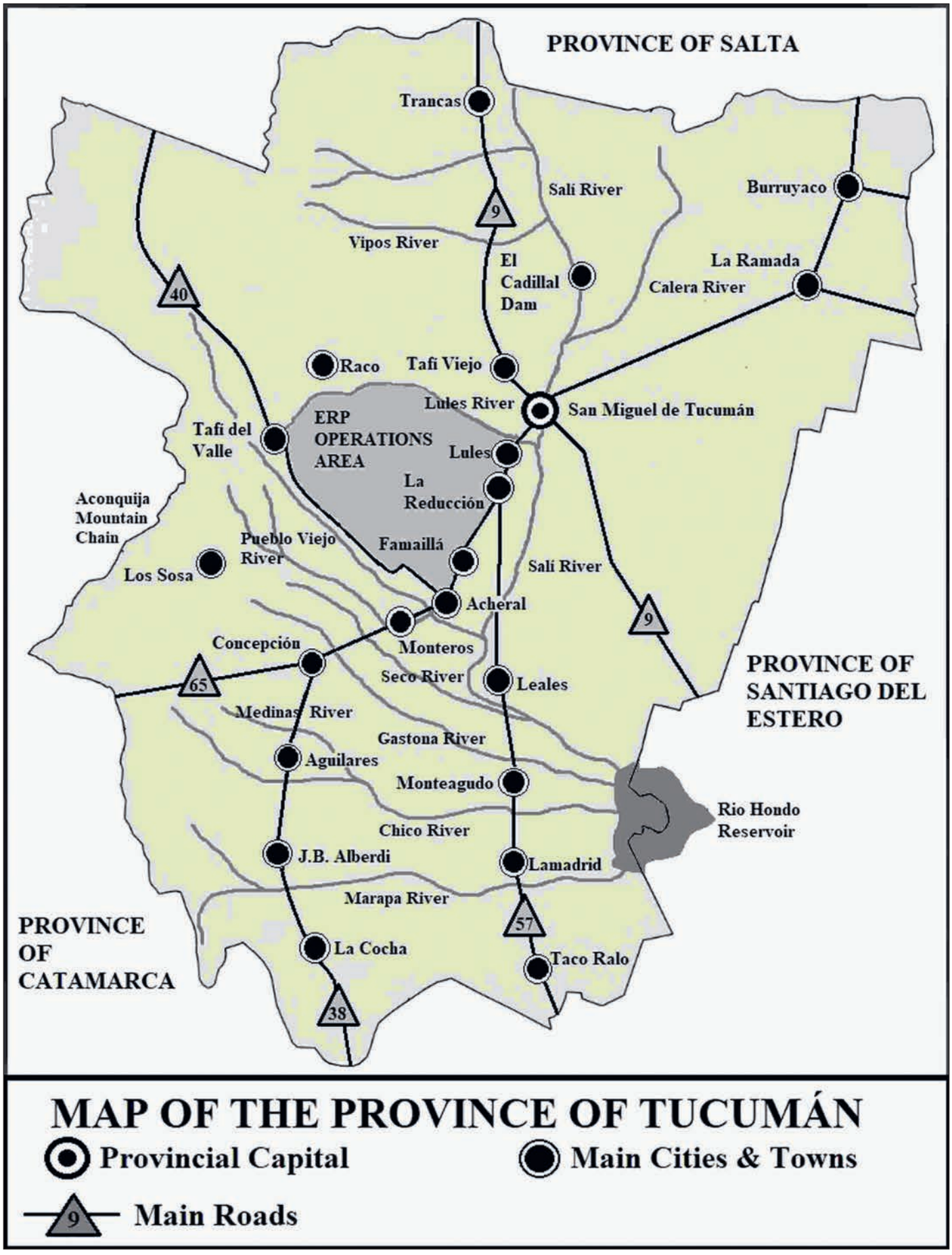
The province of Tucumán, located in the northwest of Argentina, is the nation's smallest province, covering only 22,524 square kilometres (8,696 square miles), with a population of 780,776 in the 1970s. Its capital is the city of San Miguel de Tucumán, it is crossed by numerous rivers and there is abundant rainfall. The west of the province is mountainous, with peaks up to 5,000 metres (16,400ft). Much of the province is occupied by subtropical forests.

The theatre of operations had three well-defined sectors: The first was on the western slopes of the mountains, covered with thick vegetation. The second was an agricultural area, with thousands of hectares planted with sugar cane. Many peasants settled in these two sectors, making it difficult to use artillery and aerial bombardment against the guerrillas. It was impossible to employ tanks and armoured vehicles, with trails that could hardly even be used by four-wheel-drive vehicles. This territory had some clearings used as landing areas for helicopters that transported troops or evacuated the wounded. As the guerrillas hid in the sugar cane plantations, the Army's UH-1H helicopters used tactics that consisted of 'combing' the cane fields by flying very low and at a slightly inclined angle, which made it possible to flatten the canes and thus reveal the guerrillas hiding there and kill them with machine guns and rockets. The third area was the urban sector, in the cities and towns of the province. The urban struggle was carried out there, and this was perhaps the most difficult sector for the armed forces, since the guerrillas blended in with the rest of the population. In this sector, the collaboration of the Federal and Provincial Police, the National Gendarmerie and Army Intelligence elements was crucial.

In 1972, the ERP had sent a group led by Ramón Rosa Jiménez (known as *El Zurdo*) to study a possible theatre of operations in the province of Tucumán. The group clashed with the local police, Jiménez being killed and other members captured.

The following year, the ERP decided on operations in Tucumán based on three stages. First stage, covert operations, between October 1973 and May 1974, which included reconnaissance of the terrain, adaptation of combatants to the terrain and military training, with maximum secrecy and isolation. Second stage, open operations, between May and December 1974, with the taking of small towns, terrorist acts and an increase in propaganda. Third stage, combat capability development, beginning in December 1974, with armed actions against the security forces and the installation of a 'liberated area' in Tucumán, with a request for recognition as a fighting force by the UN and various individual countries.

Views of the city of San Miguel de Tucumán, the provincial capital, in the mid-1970s. (Open Source)



The province of Tucumán. (Map by Author)

Benjamín Matienzo Airport in San Miguel de Tucumán in the 1970s. It was the scene of numerous military flights during *Operativo Independencia*, and even an attack against a C-130 of the FAA. (Open Source)

Two peasants peeling sugar cane in a typical Tucumán sugar cane field. (Open Source)

Thus, the *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company of the ERP was born and the first camps were established in the province of Tucumán: the Central Camp in La Fronterita, another camp in Potrero Negro and further smaller camps in the mid-west area of the province.

At the beginning of 1975, subversive violence continued to increase, but that year was crucial in the fight against the guerrillas. Just as both the ERP and the *Montoneros* had their own plans for 1975, the armed forces were also preparing for a large-scale military operation, in which the Argentine Army would be involved directly, with the help of the Gendarmerie and the Federal Police, as well as tactical units of the FAA and ARA. The ERP's plans to install a guerrilla force in the forests of Tucumán were well known, so a series of reconnaissance flights were carried out across the probable zone of conflict in the province. During that year, the commander of the ERP, Mario Roberto Santucho, commented to his brother Asdrúbal, an ERP official: 'I believe that in order to achieve the socialist homeland we are going to have to kill no less than a million people.'[2] There was thus no doubt about the lengths to which he was preparred to go to impose his ideology with fire and blood.

V Infantry Brigade of III Army Corps, assigned to *Operativo Independencia*, had under its command the units shown in Table 1.[3] These units comprised around 4,000 troops, including 150 officers and 750 non-commissioned officers. Combat Aviation Battalion 601 (with UH-1H helicopters) and Electronic Operations Group 602, along with their logistical echelons, were also deployed. They also had the invaluable help of personnel from the FAA, Naval Aviation, Federal Police, Provincial Police and National Gendarmerie.

Subsequently, III Corps command involved sections of Artillery Group 141 based in Córdoba, Group A of Artillery Group 101, belonging to X Mechanised Brigade, which rotated with Groups B and C specially created for that purpose, and part of VIII Mountain Brigade based in Mendoza, which dispatched the 22nd Mountain Infantry Regiment (RIM 22) based in San Juan to the war zone, whose mission was to reinforce the troops committed to the Tucumán theatre of operations.

The intervening troops were divided into the following four *Fuerza de Tarea* (Task Forces, FT):

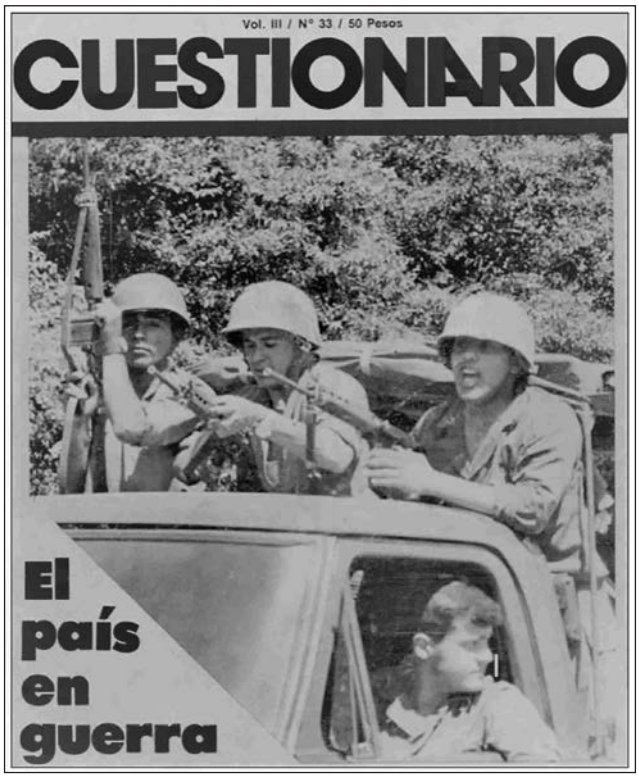
- Aconquija FT, whose base was the former Santa Lucía sugar mill, with troops from the Tucumán RI's 19 Infantry Regiment and the RIM's 20 Mountain Infantry Regiment from Tartagal, Salta. Area of operations: Santa Lucía.
- Chañí FT, whose base was the school in the town of Los Sosa, with troops from the RIM's 20 Mountain Infantry Regiment and a battery from the GAM 5 Mountain Artillery Group, both from Jujuy. Later, it changed its name to the Captain Cáceres FT, in honour of an officer who died in combat. Area of operations: Los Sosa.
- Rayo FT, whose base was La Fronterita sugar mill, near Famaillá, with effectives of the Explosives Detachment of Military Company 141 and Combat Engineer Brigade 141, both from Santiago del Estero. Area of Operations: La Fronterita.
- Condor FT, in the area of the Quebrada de Lules, with troops from the RIM's 16 Mountain Infantry Regiment from Uspallatda, Mendoza, and 22 Mountain Infantry Regiment from San Juan. Area of Operations: Lules.

These task forces raided the Tucumán forests in search of subversive elements and engaged in combat on numerous occasions. Two urban task groups were also created:

- San Miguel FT, made up of 290 troops, with a company from RI 19, a command and service section of V Brigade, a company from Arsenal 5 and Communications Section 5. It also had 60 men from the security infantry guard of the Federal Police and 30 troops from the police of the province of Tucumán.
- A special Task Force was organised with 30 men from the Tucumán Province Police in the city of Concepción.

Table 1: Argentine Army V Infantry Brigade Components		
Unit	**Main Base**	**Strength**
Infantry Regiment 19 (RI 19)	Tucumán	900
Mountain Infantry Regiment 20 (RIM 20)	Jujuy	900
Mountain Infantry Regiment 28 (RIM 28) (*)	Salta	900
Cavalry Scouting Detachment 105	Salta	200
Mountain Artillery Group 5 (GAM 5)	Jujuy	600
Mountain Engineering Company 5 (Ca Ing Mta 5)	Salta	150
Communications Company 5 (Ca Com 5)	Salta	100–150
Arsenal Company 5 (Ca Ars 5)	Tucumán	100
Health Company 5 (Ca Sanid 5)	Salta	100
(*) Mount means Jungle or Forest in Spanish. A Mount Regiment is trained to fight in a deep forest or jungle.		

This map of the province of Tucumán was widely used by the military government to promote the fight against the guerrillas. The text says: 'Cradle of Independence (1816–1977); Sepulchre of Subversion (1975–1977)'. (Open Source)



This magazine cover shows a military truck transporting soldiers to the operations front in Tucumán in January 1975. (*Revista Cuestionario*)

Each task group was commanded by military personnel specialised in commando-type operations, experts in the use of weapons of war and with excellent combat skills. Four combat teams (EC) were also planned:

- Ibatín
- Los Montañeses (RIM 22)
- Mataco (RIM 28)
- Cóndor (Army Aviation). At the beginning of the military operations, EC Cóndor had four Bell UH-1Hs, one Aérospatiale SA.315B Lama, two Piper L-21Bs and a maintenance group.

The military deployment was organised through six tactical plans, from 24 January 1975 to 20 December of that year. Military operations in Tucumán had three phases:

- First Phase: ISOLATION, which took place from February–June 1975, with missions to detect subversive elements, their camps and logistics chain. The Army carried out offensive patrols for this purpose. There were also civic action missions in support of the civil population of Tucumán. The military assigned to these tasks comprised 2,500 men, plus 250 police officers and 250 members of the Gendarmerie. The FAA collaborated with transport flights and the Naval Aviation with reconnaissance flights. In this phase, the ERP mainly avoided combat.
- Second Phase: HARASSMENT, from June–October 1975. In this phase, the Army penetrated deep into the forests, cutting off the logistics chain and ERP informants, forcing them to fight. The number of military personnel increased to 4,800 troops, with two regiments permanently operating in the forests. The ERP, forced to fight, suffered crushing defeats.
- Third Phase: CONSOLIDATION, from October 1975 until the end of the conflict. In this phase, the fight against the guerrillas spread to the whole country. The Army's aim was to wear down, harass and destroy the insurgents. Civic action missions for the

Infantry of the Argentine Army proudly pose with their FAL assault rifles, before being sent to Tucumán in 1975. (*Ejército Argentino*)

Major General Mario Benjamín Menéndez (third from the right), commander of III Army Corps, supervising the mobilisation of troops in Tucumán. (*Ejército Argentino*)

civilian population increased. For this phase, the number of troops deployed in Tucumán dropped to some 2,000.

On Sunday, 5 January 1975, De Havilland Canada DHC-6-200 Twin Otter serial AE-259 of General Support Aviation Squadron 603 of the Army Aviation (*Aviación del Ejército*, AE) in the service of III Army Corps, with three crew members and 10 senior military officers, carried out a reconnaissance flight over the Tafí del Valle zone, an area surrounding Provincial Route 307, where it was thought that the ERP would begin its military operations in the province of Tucumán. The objective was to adjust the military plans that were being prepared to launch *Operativo Independencia*. However, the weather conditions were marginal, with low visibility, and the aircraft crashed some 2,000 metres (6,562ft) up Nuñorco Chico hill. All on board perished instantly, including Major General Enrique Eugenio Salgado (commander of III Army Corps), Brigadier General Ricardo Agustín Muñoz (commander of V Brigade), Colonel Eduardo Wilfredo Cano, lieutenant colonels Oscar Rubén Bevione, Pompilio Schilardi and Pedro Santiago Petrecca, majors Roberto Dante Biscardi, Pedro Antonio Zelaya, Héctor Abel Sánchez and Aldo Emilio Peppa, Captain Roberto Carlos Aguilera (pilot), 1st Lieutenant Carlos Eduardo Correa (copilot) and 1st Sergeant Aldo Ramón Linares (mechanic-navigator). The ERP wasted no time after this tragic accident in claiming to have shot down the Twin Otter using Soviet weapons, but their claims were refuted after a meticulous study of the remains of the aircraft. Furthermore, the insurgents never had Soviet weapons, much less anti-aircraft machine guns. All the deceased received a funeral with full military honours and were posthumously promoted to the next higher rank.

Tactical Plan No. 1 was carried out between 24 January and 24 February 1975, which consisted of the movement of the military units assigned to *Operativo Independencia* to the theatre of operations in Tucumán, as well as the first operations and combats against the ERP in the forests.

The government headed by President María Estela Martínez de Perón issued Secret Decree-Law No. 261/75 on 5 February 1975, by which *Operativo Independencia* was officially launched. Under this decree, the General Command of the Army was to carry out military operations to neutralise and/or annihilate the subversive organisations that were operating in the province of Tucumán. The Ministry of the Interior was to make the Federal Police available and under the control of the Army, and also provided for the close collaboration of the ARA and FAA for military operations. Likewise, civic action operations would be carried out for the population of the Tucumán area, in coordination with the Ministry of Social Welfare. The sum of 40 million pesos was made available to finance the military operations, which corresponded to the general budget of the whole year of 1975. The decree was signed by the President and seven of her ministers.

Brigadier General Acdel Edgardo Vilas was appointed commander of the Army's V Brigade in place of the late General Muñoz. The deployment of 1,500 soldiers began at 6:00 a.m. on 9 February and was completed that same afternoon, establishing General Vilas's Tactical Command at the police station in the city of Famaillá, 35km from the city of San Miguel de Tucumán and 10 of the hills where the guerrillas

Army Aviation De Havilland Canada DHC-6-200 Twin Otter, serial AE-259. (De Havilland Canada)

Remains of the DHC-6 Twin Otter found by Army personnel on the slopes of Cerro Nuñorco Chico at 6,500ft. (*Ejército Argentino*)

were concentrated. The bulk of the troops were based in the towns along Route 38 to cut the guerrillas' ties with the civilian population and thus avoid their supply by local people.

In less than a month, General Vilas drew up a tactical plan consisting of an advance into and occupation of the area dominated by the guerrillas, and permanent patrol missions to detect their centres of operations. For this, Vilas installed his general command in Famaillá, arranging, at the same time, the creation of three other bases for the task forces employed in operations, one in Los Sosa, another in Santa Lucía and the third in Las Fronteritas. Sometime later, a fourth base was created for the troops of RIM 22 coming from San Juan.

Fearing a massive withdrawal of the ERP towards urban areas, the command also ordered the creation of two other bases, one in San Miguel de Tucumán and another in Concepción, to neutralise subversive cadres that moved outside the area of operations.

Argentina thus entered into an open war, mobilising a significant military force that, after a year-and-a-half of combat, would achieve a resounding victory.

First Operations in the Jungle

The first operations in the forests had been carried out by Police Commissioner Alberto Villar, at the head of his Federal Police *Centuriones* (Centurions) squad, in May 1974. These were followed a few months later by then-Colonel Mario Benjamín Menéndez, who did so twice – in August and November – without detecting the enemy, who, alerted by informers in the capital of the province, avoided combat in order to produce what is commonly called a 'tactical vacuum'. Both Villar and Menéndez found hideouts, shelters and several abandoned camps, but no insurgents, so, following instructions given beforehand, left the area and headed towards their camps.

Based on that experience, General Vilas put his own strategy into practice, occupying the area dominated by the guerrillas and carrying out constant patrols, similar to those undertaken by Villar and Menéndez. However, to improve his chances of success, Vilas concentrated on cutting the logistics chain of the guerrillas in the cities. Special attention was paid to small grocery stores in the towns and cities, where the guerrillas, disguised as ordinary citizens, obtained canned food and other provisions.

At that time, the ERP had a powerful rearguard infrastructure, especially in San Miguel de Tucumán, from where three levels of components operated: the combatants themselves, militants and sympathisers, who from their fighting posts monitored and conducted intelligence operations against the security forces. However, the Army and the police also worked incessantly, and information that arrived daily at V Brigade's operations centre from different parts of the country led to a reduction in the enemy's movements and considerably reducing the number of their personnel.

Maj. Gen. Enrique E. Salgado
Brig. Gen. Ricardo A. Muñoz
Col. Eduardo W. Cano
Lt. Col. Oscar R. Bevione
Lt. Col. Pedro S. Petrecca
Lt. Col. Pompilio Schilardi
Maj. Héctor A. Sánchez
Maj. Aldo E. Pepa
Maj. Pedro A. Zelaya
Maj. Roberto D. Biscardi
Capt. Roberto C. Aguilera
1st. Lt. Carlos E. Correa
1st. Sgt. Aldo R. Linares

The 13 passengers and crew of the Twin Otter, all of whom were killed. (*Revista Así*)

Taking advantage of the fact that the ERP's Mountain Company was temporarily withdrawn in urban areas, General Vilas and his forces entered the rural sector to reconnoitre the terrain and acclimatise to the jungle. The tactical plan of V Infantry Brigade consisted of the occupation of critical points, the neutralisation of possible escape routes, the progressive exercise of control over the population in different localities and the control of internal routes and access roads to the province. There was also a progressive intensification of offensive patrolling and actions against the urban guerrillas, the parallel implementation of a civic action programme for the population and tactical movements towards new combat areas.

The Battle of the Quebrada de Lules

The large-scale campaign in the Tucumán forests began on 9 February 1975. At first light on that day, members of the armed forces left their bases at the foot of the hills and slowly climbed the slopes to enter the jungle. They did so divided into patrols of between eight and 12 men, crossing ravines and hollows, generally each group carrying a MAG machine gun and PCR radio equipment with a short antenna in addition to their individual weapons, loading their backpacks with everything they needed for the following 24 hours.

The city of Tucumán was the scene of an unusual deployment, with troops from the Army, Gendarmerie and Federal Police patrolling

Major General Mario Benjamín Menéndez (left) and Brigadier General Acdel Vilas (right) review V Brigade troops assigned to the theatre of operations in Tucumán in February 1975. (*Ejército Argentino*)

Famaillá Police Station was used as the headquarters of the Tactical Command of the Operations Forces in Tucumán and was consequently very well guarded. (*Ejército Argentino*)

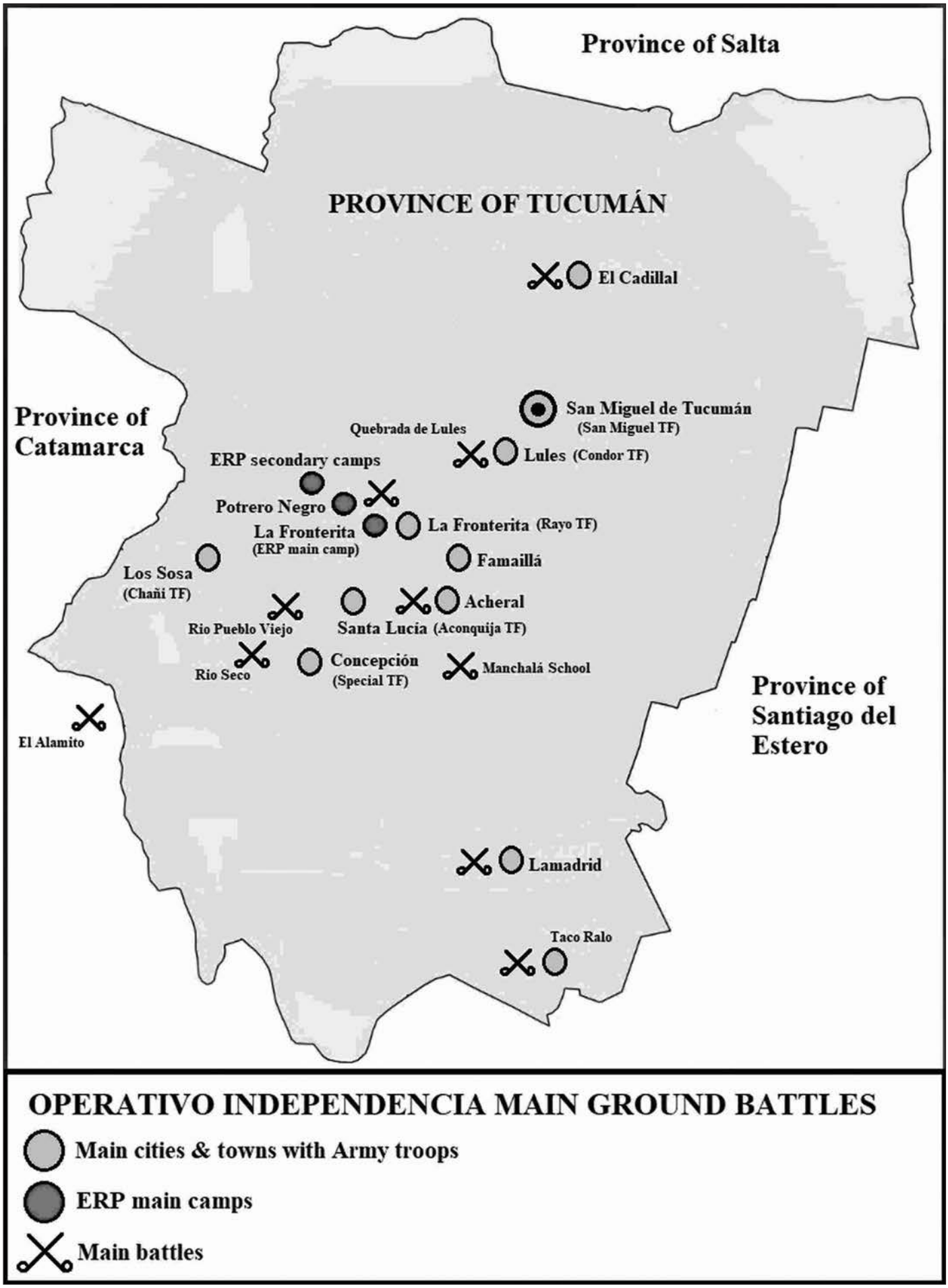
the streets, erecting sandbag barriers at junctions and boarding trucks to be transported to the area of operations. It was imperative to acclimatise the troops to the terrain and maintain vigilance, since until then the enemy had evaded armed confrontation, generating a 'tactical vacuum', a strategy that had brought them successful results.

On 9 February, a company of the Federal Police Infantry Guard that was travelling in a truck along the road between San Pablo and Potrero de Las Tablas came under heavy fire from five positions on the top of a hill located between two ravines. The seven guerrillas who carried out the ambush were aided by an observer located in an improvised lookout post on top of a tree, but their firing still proved ineffective. Receiving heavy fire from FAL small arms and hand grenades, the police truck accelerated away for some 200 metres, then stopped. With a grenade exploding in the ravine on the other side of the road causing a cloud of smoke, the police were able to retrace their steps and pass in front of the guerrilla positions again, their vehicle being struck by several shots. The security forces, with two wounded on their backs, got out of the vehicle and repelled the attack, forcing the insurgents to withdraw. The police officers rushed after the fleeing subversives, climbing the hill while leaving behind a comrade to request medical help. After a few minutes, the police arrived at an abandoned camp in the middle of the mountains, where they verified the location of fortified strongpoints, an observation post and a cleared sector for tents.

The Battle of the Río Pueblo Viejo

On 14 February, a larger confrontation took place close to the town of Yacuchina, in the vicinity of the Río Pueblo Viejo, where Army troops engaged in a firefight with a group of 30 guerrillas who were moving through the area.

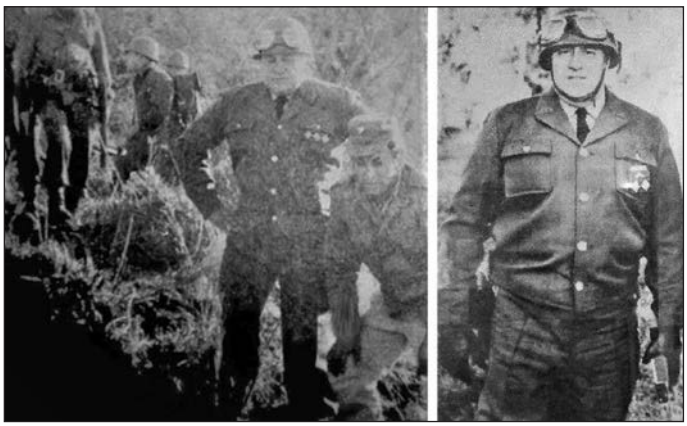
That day, a company from the 20th Mountain Infantry Regiment and a battery from the 5th Mountain Artillery Group, based at the Los Sosa school, undertook a scouting mission in the direction of Villa Quinteros. The troops left in two trucks, heading towards National Route 38, passing through the town of Monteros after crossing the bridge over the Pueblo Viejo River. They reached Villa Quinteros without any problems, after passing through León Rouges, resuming their journey along a secondary road that passed through La Florida, skirting a large forest reserve on their right. Once past Pueblo Viejo, a historic hamlet that was once the ancient city of Tucumán, the



Argentine Army Task Forces deployed in the province of Tucumán in 1975 and locations of the main battles. (Map by author)

There was a complete militarisation of the main cities, towns and highways of the province of Tucumán in February 1975. The photos show reinforced military posts in the city of Famaillá. (Open Source).

Aerial view of the city of Famaillá (left). At the Command Post of V Infantry Brigade of the Argentine Army in Famaillá, the sign says 'Military Zone. No Entry' (right). (Open Source)



General Commissioner Alberto Villar, with a police force known as the *Centuriones*, made the first incursions into the forests of Tucumán and Catamarca in search of the guerrilla camps. (*Policía Federal Argentina*)

Brigadier General Acdel Vilas, commander of V Infantry Brigade, in combat uniform in the middle of the Tucumán jungle (left). Army troops controlling a provincial road in Tucumán in 1975 (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

Before the arrival of Army troops in Tucumán, it was the police of that province who were in charge of locating and capturing members of the logistics chain and sympathisers of the ERP (left). Members of the police of Tucumán province in front of protesters (right). (Open Source)

soldiers, led by a civilian settler as their guide, dismounted and continued on foot.

The advance force was headed by Lieutenant Rodolfo Richter, with 1st Lieutenant Héctor Cáceres being in overall command, both being members of Task Force Chañí. The platoon, divided into two groups of 37 troops, began its advance (according to the insurgents, accompanied by dogs), patrolling the flanks to provide protection up to a distance of 200 metres. Other officers who participated in the action were Major Julio Luis Teodomiro Bidone and Captain Juan Carlos Jones Tamayo.

At 4:00 p.m., the platoon reached the banks of the Pueblo Viejo River, where a halt was called. At that point, the officers in charge decided to return to the town but along a different route, skirting the course of the river to cover a wider area. The troops continued their march when, at 5:00 p.m., Lieutenant Richter noticed an armed man on a side road. The man was wearing a uniform and, without saying a word, opened fire, forcing the officer to seek protection. As he retreated into a clump of bushes on a knoll, Lieutenant Richter was shot in the back by an Ithaca SMG and fell badly wounded as fighting raged around him involving the original attacker and several accomplices. Seeing his fellow officer fall, 1st Lieutenant Cáceres ran to assist him and offer protection, while continuing to shoot, but was killed by a shot that struck his right shoulder and knocked him to the ground, dying almost instantly. The bullet was found to have deflected off his shoulder blade and pierced his heart. With the fire fight intensifying, the wounded Lieutenant Richter took a Mk.3 grenade and, after drawing its pin, threw it at the attackers, seeing, as the smoke from the explosion dispersed, that one of them had been killed.

The Cóndor Combat Team had its baptism of fire that day when two UH-1Hs, one fully armed with machine guns and rocket launchers, and the other with stretchers for casualties, were dispatched to the Pueblo Viejo River to provide support to elements of FT Chañí who had engaged in combat with the insurgents. Despite coming under heavy enemy fire, including from ground-to-air rockets, the Hueys attacked guerrilla positions with machine guns and XM158 rockets, killing several subversives. UH-1H serial AE-405, piloted by Captain Arturo Grandinetti, landed in a small clearing nearby to evacuate three wounded soldiers and Lieutenant Richter, along with the corpse of 1st Lieutenant Cáceres. They were taken to Tucumán. This was the first Medevac mission carried out by the Argentine Army Aviation. The fighting at the Pueblo Viejo River ended with six ERP fatalities and just one for the Army (1st Lieutenant Cáceres), in addition to two officers and a corporal wounded.

Despite the fierceness with which they had fought, the guerrillas began to show signs of exhaustion and decided to withdraw, moving in a westerly direction. The first section of the Army detachment made a detour to the south but was unable to head them off.

At nightfall, the national forces were able to verify that two guerrillas had been killed. 1st Lieutenant Héctor Cáceres, meanwhile, was promoted to the rank of captain *postmortem*, and in his honour a new town was founded in Tucumán that took the name of Capitán Cáceres.

Due to his spinal cord injury, Lieutenant Richter was paralysed for life from the waist down. He would continue his career as an Army officer in a wheelchair, in administrative posts, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel and only retiring in the 1990s. The two other personnel seriously injured in the combat at Río Pueblo Viejo were Sub Lieutenant Daniel Arias and 1st Corporal Ángel Orlando Orellana.

Subsequent Actions

On 24 February, a further air accident had a profound impact on the progress of operations when Army Aviation L-21B Super Cub serial AE-008, which belonged to Combat Aviation Battalion 601 and was on a mission to patrol the combat zone, crashed on the eastern slopes of the Aconquija mountains due to difficult weather conditions. Its two crew members, 1st Lieutenant Carlos María Casagrande (observer), commander of Company B of the 19th Infantry Regiment, and Sub Lieutenant Gustavo Pablo López (pilot), died instantly. A few hours after radio communication with the Piper was lost, search patrols were organised with the collaboration of FAA personnel stationed at *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport, members of the Gendarmerie, Federal Police and ARA who had deployed air units in the area in support of the campaign. Two FAA Grumman HU-16B Albatross and two Morane Saulnier MS.760 Paris aircraft, together with a Naval Aviation Lockheed SP-2 Neptune and three Army Aviation UH-1H helicopters, were dispatched on a search and rescue operation. They were joined by three civilian Pipers belonging to Aero Club Tucumán. These aircraft carried out constant flights over the mountainous sector and low-lying areas that extended to the east. However, the density of the forest and the fact that the lost aircraft was painted green made it very difficult to locate. Military and police troops and even civilian volunteers also searched from the ground, but despite the extensive deployment, the remains of the Piper and its occupants would not be found until two-and-a-half years later, covered by bush, when a group of soldiers was patrolling the area on a routine mission. It was the second aircraft that the Argentine armed forces lost during the conflict. Both officers were posthumously promoted to a higher rank.

Tactical Plan No. 2 was launched on 25 February, with the area of operations of FT Cóndor being expanded and the reinforcement of the *Jesús María* Gendarmerie Squadron. It was at this point that

Army soldiers checking the documents of the civilian population in Tucumán (left) and arresting people suspected of collaborating with ERP subversives (right). (Open Source)

Troops from Army Anti-Aircraft Artillery Group 601 assisting members of the poor civilian population with bags of food in the province of Tucumán. (*Ejército Argentino*)

General Acdel Vilas decided to extend the radius of operations to the towns of Lules and Las Tapias in the north and Villa Nougués in the south, including El Cadillal and Tafí Viejo, and to take the war to the deepest corners of the forests, where, up until that moment, the guerrillas had existed in safety. By then, some 1,500 effectives of the security forces, mainly from the Army, had already been deployed to the area of operations.

The fight on the Río Pueblo Viejo had taken both sides by surprise and put their respective capabilities to the test. Thereafter, the action intensified, notably when the ERP reorganised its squads and embarked on new missions, one of them leading to a further armed clash that took place on 26 February at La Fronterita sugar mill in Famaillá.

In March, a guerrilla group that was climbing the slopes of a mountain near Acheral was ambushed by an Army patrol that put them to flight. Two insurgents were killed in this action and government forces seized powerful radio equipment that proved extremely useful in subsequent actions.

On 3 April, a platoon of FT Rayo was crossing a bridge over the Río Seco when it came under heavy enemy fire from positions close to the watercourse. The soldiers threw themselves to the ground and managed to repel the attack, killing two subversives and forcing the remainder to flee. Nine days later, in a clash at Ischillón, a soldier by the name of Gutiérrez (from the class of 54) was killed and another member of the ERP was killed. In further confrontations in the vicinity of the Lules River on 5 April, and then at Atahona and Ibatín on 29 April, four more terrorists fell. Government forces subsequently discovered a significant number of outposts and camps that they dynamited after seizing weapons, ammunition and important documentation.

Raking Operations

General Vilas's plan seemed to have an effect on the course of the conflict. During the month of April, the insurgent forces had suffered several setbacks and had become disoriented and when the supply of funds to the ERP's forest company was cut off, its troops began to desert. The situation became worrying for the ERP high command, who, in an emergency meeting, decided to deepen the training of their cadres in a bid to prevent them from abandoning the area of operations.

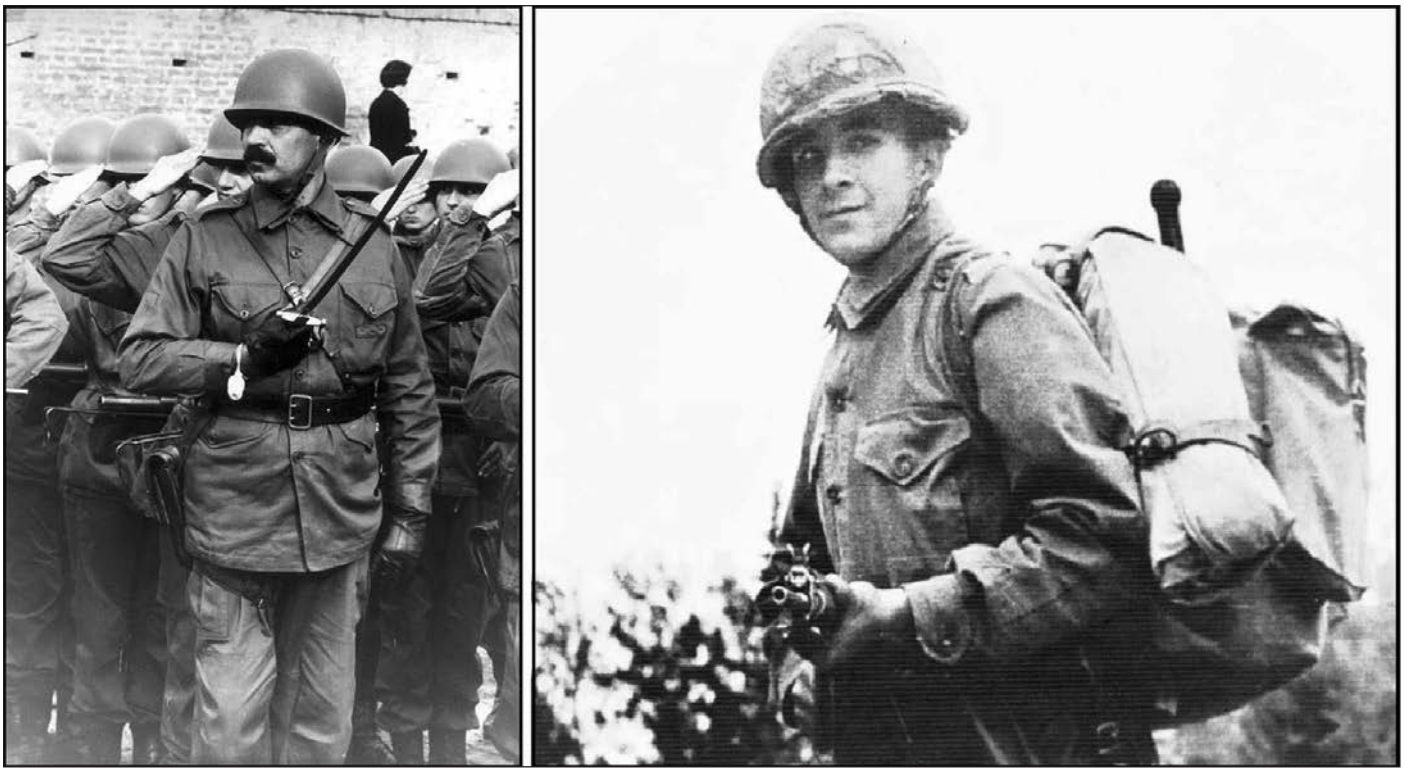
As a result of this change in tactics, the Argentine Army mobilised more forces, deploying the San Juan Squadron of the Gendarmerie to the south of the Pueblo Viejo River, covering the area up to National Route 65. This move was caused by the change of direction that the guerrillas demonstrated when launching raids on San Pedro, Taco Ralo, Lamadrid, Atahona, Río Seco, Concepción, León Rugés and Simoca.

The measures led to the detection of four new camps in the vicinity of La Higuera and a violent attack carried out by Communications Company 5 immediately afterwards, evicting their occupants and proceeding to blow up the camps, a situation that was repeated at other points near the Escaba reservoir.

Following these operations, a large sector occupied by the guerrillas returned to the control of state forces. There were also actions in the northwest of the province, where FT San Martín aborted an insurgent movement intended to open new fronts in that sector. However, not all events went in the government's favour, as on 11 May there was a shooting at a checkpoint in the middle of Provincial Route 301, in which Sub Lieutenant Raúl Ernesto García was killed. The subversive group that attacked the checkpoint was under the command of Wilfredo Siles (known as *Sargento Lin*), a fighter of Bolivian origin, who, following the usual rules of guerrilla warfare, thereafter withdrew into the jungle.

The ERP Attack on Army Arsenal Battalion 121

As has already been noted, outside of Tucumán, the armed forces remained in a passive state, observing events as mere spectators, waiting to be attacked before acting. However, neither the Argentine Army nor its ARA and FAA counterparts, which had not fought since 1955, seemed prepared for a counterinsurgency campaign. The armed



An Argentine Army officer in the mid-1970s in front of his platoon (left). A soldier with all his combat equipment, ready to go to the front of operations in Tucumán (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

Soldiers of the Argentine Army fighting in the area of Río Pueblo Viejo, in the middle of the Tucumán jungle, in February 1975. (Open Source)

forces showed serious shortcomings at a professional level and, most worryingly, an alarming lack of preparation in terms of organisation and security. This was demonstrated again on Sunday 13 April 1975 during an attack on the Army's Arsenal Battalion 121 located in Fray Luis Beltrán, in the province of Santa Fe. The arsenal contained a factory for steel and artillery shells, fire indicators, fuses, trotyl explosives, field kitchens and trailers, as well as important workshops where cannons, howitzers, vehicles and weapons of various calibre were repaired.

With it being a Sunday, visiting relatives and friends of conscripts, as well as officers and non-commissioned officers, were present on that rainy day, intending to enjoy a moment of relaxation with their loved ones. The unit commander, Lieutenant Colonel Jaime López Campos, was unaware that outside, surrounding the battalion, a powerful insurgent force was preparing to attack the base. Around 1:00 p.m., a corporal, accompanied by a private soldier, proceeded to open one of the side entrances to the base to let in visitors. Disguised among the visitors were a pair of ERP militants, whose mission was to overcome the guard so that their comrades could enter the base. They duly subdued the guard, acting in coordination with a member of the ERP, infiltrated as a conscript, Horacio Stanley, allowing some 30 ERP fighters to burst into the base, wearing military uniforms and brandishing various weapons, including machine guns. They were then joined by others, the force totalling at least 80 combatants, part of the recently created *Combate de San Lorenzo* Urban Company, reinforced by sections of the veteran *Heroes de Trelew* and *Decididos de Córdoba* companies. The attackers broke into the Belgrano post, its chief, NCO Raúl Esteban Rébora, opened fire on them, but was

Two heroes of the combat in Río Pueblo Viejo: Lieutenant Rodolfo Richter, wounded in combat (right), and 1st Lieutenant Héctor Cáceres, killed while trying to help his wounded comrade (left). (*Ejército Argentino*)

First Lieutenant Héctor Cáceres (first from the right) in an Army camp with two soldiers from his platoon, in the middle of the Tucumán jungle, before the action in Río Pueblo Viejo. (*Ejército Argentino*)

himself shot several times by a woman, one of the many among the assault groups.

Following a plan drawn up by the insurgent high command, the attackers used several vehicles to penetrate the base at high speed, while the 2nd Assault Group proceeded to reduce the guard. Demonstrating excellent timing and a high degree of training, the 4th Assault Group seized a military bus and, followed by the remaining vehicles – including a second bus, two pick-up trucks and at least one white Renault 4L – headed for the Command and Services Company, where the base's weapons were stored. The attack was planned by Juan Eliseo Ledesma, chief of the ERP General Staff, and was led by Captain Santiago Hernán Krasuk, known as *Luis*.

Hearing a commotion, Colonel Arturo Horacio Carpani Costa, Operations Officer of II Army Corps, took his regulation pistol and ran towards the central square. It was only then that he realised that the attackers had used numerous vehicles and were blending in with military personnel and visitors. At that moment, the commander of the battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Jaime López Campos, established communication with the command of II Army Corps and, after reporting that they were being attacked, went outside followed by several men. However, Colonel Carpani Costa was immediately killed by the subversives.

In the exchange of fire, Assistant Sergeant Ricardo Alejandro Balla (who would die from his injuries hours later), 1st Sergeant Néstor Isla, Sergeant Adolfo Lucio Álvarez and conscripts Enrique Hopelert and Carlos Banegas fell wounded. In response, the soldiers managed to kill two of the insurgents: Graciela del Carmen Rubio, a beautiful 21-year-old student, and Hipólito Agustín Leyes, known as *El Tío*, a 50-year-old construction worker.

The attackers seized 74 FAL rifles, two FAP and two MAG machine guns, 112 pistols, five grenade launchers, 74 submachine guns, 600 rounds of ammunition for rifles, supplies and large amounts of ammunition. They were unhindered in carrying out this operation. They acted with absolute security, achieving their mission in a timely manner. As soon as they entered the area, they pointed guns at the conscripts who were guarding the warehouse, forced them to open their gates, load their weapons and deposit them inside the vehicles, all under the cover of the containment group. As had been the case in earlier attacks on Azul, the Health Command, Communications Battalion 141 and the Villa María military factory, the unit was taken by surprise, the personnel being completely unaware they were under attack.

Once they had achieved their aim, the attackers began to withdraw. They did so in an orderly manner, even when under intense fire, making their way via escape routes arranged during the operation's planning. Before doing so, they blew up the telephone exchange and machine-gunned the tyres of the military vehicles parked around the base. As soon as Lieutenant Colonel López Campos made contact with the command of II Army Corps, its head, Major General Luis Gómez Centurión, dispatched several trucks with heavily armed troops, preceded by armoured units. Numerous police detachments mobilised from Rosario and San Lorenzo were also sent, but the insurgents set up checkpoints at all the entrances to the area, from which attacks were made on the Army and police reinforcements. All the efforts made to overcome the subversive forces proved in vain, the ERP attackers vanishing without a trace.

Two Army Aviation Bell UH-1H helicopters entered into combat in Río Pueblo Viejo, one armed with machine guns and rocket launchers (top) and the other for Medevac missions (bottom). (*Ejército Argentino*)

During the middle of April, the government ordered the sending of reinforcements to Tucumán. Gendarmerie troops stationed in the western sector of the provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro boarded several military trucks and were taken to Bariloche International Airport, where an FAA Lockheed C-130 Hercules was waiting to fly them to the combat zone. All the Gendarmerie troops wore olive green uniforms and were fully armed for combat. They made up a large contingent of officers, NCOs and regular cadres from Squadrons *33 San Martín de los Andes*, *34 Bariloche* and *35 El Bolsón*, part of Group 13 of Río Negro, in the presence of their chief, Major Commander Jacobo Nasif.

As of 25 April, Tactical Plan No. 3 was implemented, which was characterised by cutting off the main access roads to the towns and cities of Tucumán province for the guerrillas, forcing them to remain in the forests and hindering their logistical support.

At the end of that month, President Isabel Perón, accompanied by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Leandro Enrique Anaya, and the Minister of Social Welfare, José López Rega, flew to Tucumán. Upon arrival, they were received by General Vilas and immediately boarded various Army Aviation UH-1H helicopters, which transported them to Famaillá. General Vilas gave them a detailed report on the situation regarding the guerrillas in the theatre of operations. After lunch, the presidential delegation flew to Santa Lucía, the base of Task Force Aconquija. Towards the end of the visit, the President addressed the public, stating that 'the Homeland is in danger but we are defending it. Everyone should be aware that if the anti-homeland [force] triumphs there will be suffering and pain in the country. Perhaps many do not understand this, because our people have not known the vicissitudes of a war'. She added that the insurgency was being financed from abroad and that there were 'people in the country who received money to carry out certain activities'.[4]

Change in the Army Command

At the beginning of May, the discomfort in the Argentine armed forces was evident, especially within the Army, where the commanders began to express their displeasure with the way the nation was being conducted, especially the counterinsurgency war and the increasingly notorious power of Minister López Rega. The situation became increasingly tense, with the nation's economy evidently deteriorating and the security forces seeming incapable of dealing with the violence. The military chiefs were beginning to show impatience and were demanding more forceful actions to put an end to the insurgency threat. The commander of the Army, Lieutenant General Anaya, publicly questioned certain government policies, which understandably did not go down well with those wielding executive power.

On 13 May, Anaya announced his retirement due to disagreements with Defence Minister Adolfo Sabino and Social Welfare Minister José López Rega, who had in fact been conspiring to remove him. On the following day, Lieutenant General Alberto Numa Laplane, until then the head of I Army Corps, took office as General Commander of the Argentine Army.

By then, the guerrillas had inflicted a serious number of casualties on government forces, with some 350 troops dead, captured or having deserted. Thirty military camps had also been attacked, with the loss of a good part of their arsenal, equipment and supplies, as General Vilas himself explained at a press conference. That was a serious setback on the part of a force that up to then numbered barely 1,500 men, all belonging to Vilas's V Infantry Brigade, not counting the losses to the other security forces.

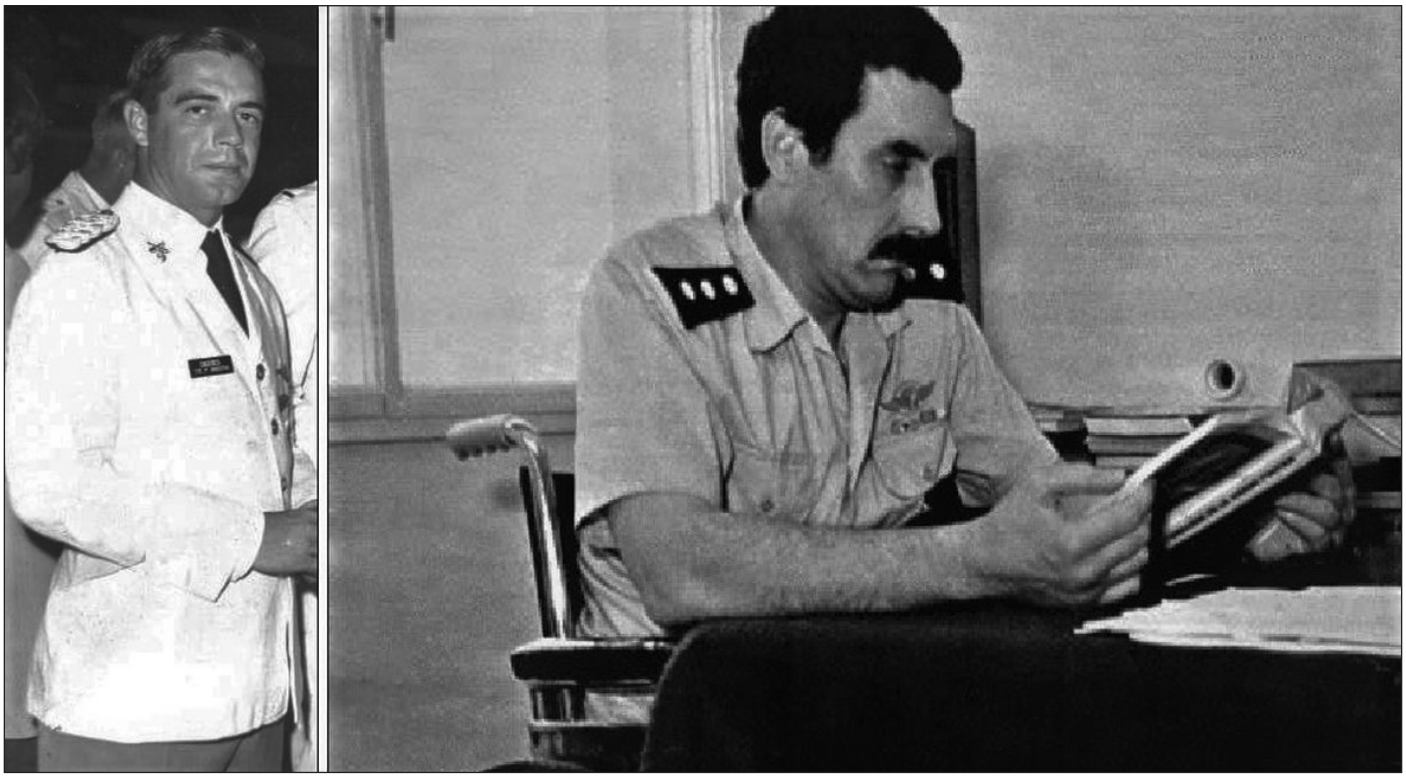
The Fight at Manchalá

At the end of May, the high command of the People's Revolutionary Army met in San Miguel de Tucumán in order to plan new armed actions. Complying with the new directives, the guerrillas, led by Manuel Negrín, Julio Abad and Wilfredo Siles, decided to attack the tactical command post of V Infantry Brigade, summoning 140 of their troops in order to occupy Famaillá, neutralise the positions of the Army, assassinate General Vilas and take hostages. Such a blow, they believed, would raise the morale of the insurgents, which had been somewhat depressed at that point due to a series of recent setbacks.

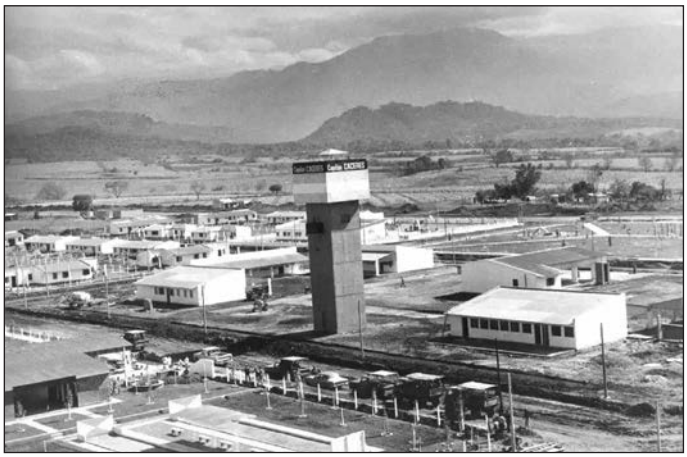
Summoning its main cadres, some of them from the Workers' Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, PRT) members from Córdoba and Santa Fe and even elements from abroad – mainly from Bolivia, Peru and Central America – the ERP prepared to fight and divided their forces into five columns:

- A Command Group led by Jorge Carlos Molina, known as *Capitán Pablo*, comprising 20 insurgents, who would be in charge of directing operations.
- Assault Group 1, or *Escuelita* (little school), with 35 combatants under the command of Manuel Negrín, known as *Teniente Roberto*, whose mission was to seize the tactical command post, take weapons and kill the largest possible number of personnel.
- Assault Group 2, or *Puente* (bridge), with 25 combatants, with the mission of occupying the bridge over the Colorado River, from where it would try to prevent the arrival of reinforcements.
- The Plaza Group, comprising 35 troops under the command of Hugo Irurzún, known as *Capitán Santiago*, which would support Assault Group 1 and cover its withdrawal.
- A first aid post, whose task was to take care of and evacuate the wounded. They had three doctors and various logistics personnel, with two vans and two trucks painted in Army colours.

Manchalá School was located on Provincial Route 99 on a bend in the road 10km from Provincial Route 38. A small number of troops belonging to the Salta-based 5th Mountain Engineering Company were engaged in carrying out repairs to the rural school's building,



1st Lieutenant Héctor Cáceres was posthumously promoted to captain (left). Lieutenant Richter was paralysed from the waist down by his injuries and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair, remaining active in the Argentine Army until the 1990s (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)



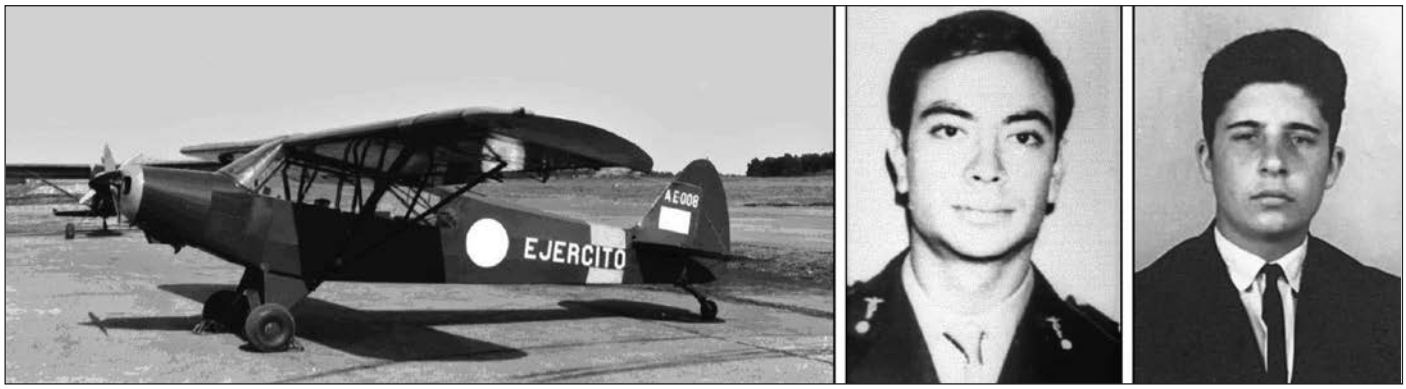
The town of Capitán Cáceres in the province of Tucumán, founded in honour of the officer who was heroically killed in combat. (Open Source)

one of the many civic action tasks that the Army carried out during *Operativo Independencia*.

From a nearby farm known as *Finca Sorteis*, the ERP loaded the units of its motorised column and set off, transporting a total of 140 heavily armed troops. The column contained a Ford F-100 and F-350 pick-up trucks, 4-ton Mercedes Benz 608 and 1114 trucks and a Rastrojero pick-up truck. Around 5:30 p.m., the vehicles, advancing in columns along Provincial Route 38, ran into an Army Unimog truck that had stopped next to the road, at one end of the bend where the school was located. Seeing a soldier standing next to the vehicle, the terrorists dismounted and opened fire without saying a word, forcing him to seek cover. Upon hearing the shots, the 10 soldiers who were working inside the school, two of whom were NCOs, took up their weapons and went outside to confront the insurgents. One guerrilla was shot dead a few metres from the road and two others were wounded, their companions regrouping and trying to surround the school. Firing from several different positions, they hit one soldier who fell seriously wounded next to the door to the school, while his companions tried to cover him with numerous shots from inside. At that moment, a voice was heard demanding surrender, but the federal troops ignored it. The situation with 140 guerrillas attacking 10 or 12 troops inside a small rural school repeated a typical picture of the heroic deeds of the times of independence and civil strife of the nineteenth century, but it was also a trap that appeared impossible to get out of. Seeing that the wounded soldier could not move, his companions threw him a rope and shouted to him to hold it firmly so they could drag him inside. Grasping the rope tightly, the soldier was pulled into the building as enemy bullets rattled around him.

Alerted by the noise of combat, seven Army personnel who were working nearby in Balderrama headed to the school in support of their comrades. They came under heavy fire, suffering one casualty, a wounded soldier, forcing them to ground in search of cover. Another Army truck with five men on board then drove along the road, coming under fire from insurgents in the nearby sugar cane fields, one soldier being wounded. The ERP motorised column tried to resume its journey, but the leading unit became bogged down and was unable to continue, preventing the movement of the other vehicles.

Despite intense gunfire, one of the soldiers managed to evade the encirclement and rushed to inform the brigade command of the situation. Orders were immediately given, and three trucks containing five officers and 10 heavily armed soldiers were dispatched to relieve their comrades under fire. They arrived at the school when it was beginning to get dark. Seeing the lights of the vehicles, the insurgents, believing they were part of a strong relief force, fled the scene. Withdrawing in a hurry, they moved through dense undergrowth in the direction of Route 301, leaving behind them two dead, Domingo Villalobos Campos (known as *Sargento Dago*) and Juan Carlos Irustia (known as *Ricardo*), along with two seriously injured, Héctor Burgos (known as *Pedro*) and Ramiro Leguizamón (known as *El Hippie*), and two damaged trucks, three vans and three radio sets. They also discarded five FAL rifles, two submachine guns, 10 shotguns, four



Piper L-21B, serial AE-008, of the Army Aviation (left), with the pilot, Sub Lieutenant Gustavo Pablo López (centre), and his observer, 1st Lieutenant Carlos María Casagrande (left). (*Ejército Argentino*)

Several aircraft were deployed in the search for the Army's L-21B, including a Grumman Albatross (left) and a Morane Saulnier MS.760 (right) from the FAA and a Lockheed SP-2 Neptune from the Naval Aviation (centre). (FAA/COAN)

carbines, two revolvers, six pistols, 26 hand grenades, another 28 anti-tank grenades, 80 Molotov cocktails and 3,100 rounds of ammunition, in addition to surgical instruments, military clothing, a scale model of the tactical command post, other equipment and a flag.

An hour after the end of the fighting, a squad of the National Gendarmerie and a combat team from FT Rayo arrived with instructions to begin a night pursuit of the fleeing enemy. Fifteen days later, the ERP continued to abandon their wounded to an uncertain fate in the jungle. The spirit of camaraderie in the Army was very different, going to great lengths in helping any wounded soldier, NCO or officer to receive medical care.

The fight at Manchalá was one of the most decisive of the Tucumán war and was a hard blow for the insurgents, as a small group of soldiers, dedicated to community tasks, had managed to repel a large and much better-equipped force.

A *communiqué* that appeared in the ERP magazine *Estrella Roja* confirmed the number of combatants engaged in the fight but included blatant lies, talking about government armoured vehicles being involved, along with close air support and a large number of Argentine Army troops, as well as falsely claiming 20 Army fatalities, twice as many wounded and an orderly withdrawal by the insurgents. It was a desperate attempt to influence public opinion and make the people believe that the 'fight' was still on, more firmly and decisively than ever. What is true is that in this encounter, 40 Army troops repelled an attack by 140 heavily armed guerrillas. There were actually no fatalities among the government troops, although there were a number of injured. However, the guerrillas suffered two dead, two seriously wounded and other injured fighters who fled and were abandoned in the jungle by their comrades. The guerrillas demonstrated once again that they were not prepared to face their opponents in battle, and that their cadres, although determined and courageous, had not received adequate training for face-to-face combat.

The Fall of López Rega

The infamous López Rega's interference in government decisions reached its peak in July 1975. Along with the terrorist attacks by subversive groups, selective assassinations by the Triple A continued. There was also a call for a general strike by the CGT on 7 July. A massive rally was held outside Government House, demanding the resignation of various government officials, including the all-powerful López Rega, for betraying the labour movement. President Isabel Perón was forced to give in, under pressure from her military commanders. On 11 July, Minister of the Interior Alberto Rocamora, Minister of Defence Adolfo Mario Savino and Minister of Social Welfare José López Rega handed in their resignations, which were accepted by the government. López Rega thus fell out of favour, to the amazement of his adherents and Triple A thugs.

That same afternoon, three squadrons of the Mounted Grenadier Regiment, commanded by Colonel Jorge Felipe Sosa Molina, broke into the Presidential House in Olivos and evicted López Rega's men. They did so in combat uniform, aboard four M113 armoured vehicles, from which they jumped out with their weapons ready. In all, they numbered about 150 troops belonging to a reinforced company. Once at the property, they ordered López Rega's men to put down their arms, which comprised Ithaca shotguns, Uzi submachine guns, Belgian-made assault rifles, automatic pistols and hand grenades. Rather than opposing the demands, the Triple A men chose to surrender. All of them were checked and asked to go home. Although the President was surprised by the operation, military chiefs assured her that it had been carried out to defend her. Within days, Perón appointed López Rega as Ambassador Plenipotentiary in Europe, a symbolic position, and he left the country on 19 July. He lived for a time in Spain, then in Switzerland and finally the Bahamas, fleeing from justice, until he decided to turn himself in to the American authorities in 1986. He was then extradited to Argentina and incarcerated in the Villa Devoto Prison, where he died in 1989 without regaining his freedom.

Further Clashes in the Forests

Between 4 June and 15 August 1975, Tactical Plan No. 4 was carried out. In June and July, the Argentine Army launched two new operations, *Parapa* and *Péndulo*, in order to patrol, ambush and 'rake' (intensively search) the area of operations. The intention was to force the guerrillas

Major General Menéndez (seated, third from right) meets with his officers in Tucumán (left). Army soldiers patrolling a provincial road in Tucumán (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

Members of the ERP's *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company in the *El Niño Perdido* (The Lost Child) camp in the middle of the Tucumán jungle. The ERP unit in the photo is the *Sargento Dago* platoon, whose commander was Oscar Asdrúbal Santucho, known as *Chicho* or *Capitán Aníbal* (first from the left). The ERP officers present were Captain Hugo Irurzún (known as *Santiago*), lieutenants Salvador Falcón (known as *Luis*), Sidel Manuel Negrín (known as *Roberto*), Abad Julio Ricardo (known as *Armando*), Lionel Juan Carlos MacDonald (known as *Raúl*) and Gutiérrez Pilín (known as *Federico*), and sergeants Luis Canfaila (known as *Chuby*) and Ricardo Maidana (known as *Negro*), in addition to some 120 combatants. (Open Source).

from their hideouts and to face government troops in the open field, knowing they would then surely be defeated. With this in mind, V Brigade received reinforcements that boosted its numbers to some 4,800 troops, who began preparations to enter the forests.

Documentation captured in Manchalá had revealed that the guerrillas had strong support from San Miguel de Tucumán, where at least 402 people from the insurgent organisation lived.

During the second phase of the operation, more terrorists were killed, including four on 23 June when government forces ambushed a column of subversives at the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA) in Metán, another when the Chañí and Rayo task forces raided Las Maravillas, a sixth when passing through Los Sosa and two more when they collided with elements of the ERP forest company southwest of Famaillá.

On 8 July, two UH-1H gunships and troops of the Rayo and Aconquija task forces converged on an industrial establishment at El Alamito, in the province of Catamarca, where they captured several guerrillas and intelligence material, weapons, ammunition and food. A few days later, two Hueys transferred a special team of 11 men to Santa María, also in Catamarca, with the same results as the previous mission. Then on 20 July, two helicopters with 16 troops made a surprise raid in the Ancajuli area in Tucumán, where they arrested 20 members of the ERP's logistics chain.

On 18 July, the ERP attempted an attack against the security forces in Las Maravillas, a village near Los Sosa, mobilising a squad of 40 fighters under the command of Lionel MacDonald, known as *Capitán Raúl*. The insurgent force engaged in a heavy fire fight near their objective, a confrontation that ended with two attackers dead and their accomplices fleeing. The subversives regrouped at an outpost in El Tiro. Twelve days later, the Argentine Army found this camp, killing two of its defenders and putting the rest to flight, heading south through the forests. The subversives then fell into a very well-planned ambush, in which the Bolivian Wilfredo Contra Siles, known as *Sargento Lin*, who had fought throughout the insurgency, was killed. El Tiro was dynamited after the FAL rifles were seized and the regular troops began to return to their base. That same day, members of the People's Revolutionary Army ambushed a Unimog truck in La Antonieta, killing one soldier and seriously wounding three others, including an officer, almost at the same moment that the men of FT Chañí were confronting other insurgent platoons in different parts of the region.

On 5 August, Lieutenant José Conrado Mundani was killed when trying to defuse a booby trap. Five days later, the military leadership discovered that the ERP intended to open new fronts in Salta and Jujuy, especially in the region of Ingenio Ledesma, as well as increasing its presence in urban centres such as the city of Córdoba, Villa Constitución (in the province of Santa Fe) and San Nicolás de los Arroyos.

As well as flying combat missions, the Hueys were used in community support operations, carrying food supplies and health care to several places in the region. In addition, the helicopters were widely used for the transfer of military and political leaders who visited Tucumán to evaluate *in situ* the development of the operation, including the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Numa Laplane, his Chief of Staff, Major General Videla, the commander of III Army Corps, Brigadier General Menéndez, as well as senators, congressional deputies and government ministers.

Air Operations in Tucumán

During August and September, the high command of V Infantry Brigade ordered a movement towards the southern sector of the *Jesús María* Squadron's area, which immediately after receiving its instructions mobilised its units towards the perimeter formed by the towns of Aguilares, Trinidad and Monteagudo, a large sector between the Marapa and Gastona rivers, to the east of the Hondo River reservoir, on which the guerrillas had converged with the firm purpose

The entrance to the base of Army Arsenal Battalion 121 in the town of Fray Luis Beltrán, Santa Fe province. (*Ejército Argentino*)

Three protagonists in the attack on Battalion 121: From left to right, Colonel Arturo Horacio Carpani Costa, assassinated by the ERP; the guerrilla Graciela del Carmen Rubio, killed in the assault; and the subversive Santiago Hernán Krasuk, known as *Luis*, who commanded the attack on the military base. (Open Source)

of starting operations. During the mission, there was a confrontation in Las Mesadas, where 1st Corporal Miguel Dardo Juárez was killed and several insurgents were wounded, although their exact number could not be specified. This was the prelude to an event that would shock national public opinion.

From 1974, an Omega inertial navigation system purchased in the US and infrared sensors were mounted on aircraft in order to detect enemy positions and had been operating in the combat area. The Argentine Naval Aviation Beechcraft B80 Queen Air, serial 4-F-21, belonging to the Aero Photographic Group at the Punta Indio Naval Air Base, had arrived at *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in the city of Tucumán in February. On 12 February, the Queen Air carried out its first sortie in order to locate ERP hideouts. As all flights from the Tucumán airport were monitored by elements of the ERP, the Queen Air was painted as a civil aircraft from the National Geodesic Institute (*Instituto Geodésico Nacional*, IGENA) and its crew, who were Naval Aviation pilots and technicians, were dressed in civilian clothes to fool the ERP spies. The Queen Air flights were always carried out at night and suspected areas were scanned from a dangerously low altitude of only 1,500ft, flying with a radio altimeter. With this valuable resource, it was possible to locate several ERP camps in the middle of the forests, which were later taken over by government ground forces or attacked by Army UH-1H helicopters armed with rocket launchers and heavy machine guns (HMGs).

Other aircraft joined the operation in the following months, including four UH-1H helicopters from the Army Aviation Assault Section and two L-21B Super Cub planes from the Army's Airmobile Battalion 601, with corresponding maintenance crews. These units would be reinforced towards the end of the war by more Army helicopters, including another five UH-1Hs, an SA.315B Lama and a National Gendarmerie Fairchild Hiller FH-1100. For its part, the Argentine Naval Aviation deployed, in addition to the Queen Air, an HU-16B Albatross for search and rescue missions, and an Aérospatiale Alouette III helicopter. Many locally manufactured rocket launchers were also mounted on the UH-1Hs.

When actions intensified in October 1975, the FAA dispatched some of their new Fábrica Militar de Aviones (FMA) IA-58 Pucará attack aircraft to the region, which would enter into combat for the first time during this conflict, together with the Douglas A-4B/C Skyhawk fighter-bombers, based at Villa Reynolds. On 18 November, the Skyhawks participated in Joint Operation Turret (*Torreón*) with elements of the Army. Armed Beechcraft T-34A Mentor two-seater trainers were also used in reconnaissance and light bombing missions. However, the largest aircraft used by the FAA in Tucumán was the C-130 Hercules, which was employed to transport troops, equipment

The National Gendarmerie troops used various types of uniforms and equipment during *Operativo Independencia*: Gendarmes in their traditional uniform and cap (left), with the Argentine Army uniform and M1 helmet (centre) and with the old Swiss M18 helmet. (*Gendarmería Nacional Argentina*)

President Isabel Perón, accompanied by Brigadier General Acdel Vilas, reviews the troops of V Infantry Brigade during her visit to Tucumán at the end of April 1975. (Open Source)

and weapons, and proved of fundamental importance throughout the conflict.

One disconcerting fact was that the guerrillas also had at least one air unit, the *Jilguero* (goldfinch), a small Hiller helicopter hijacked by the ERP from the *Compañía Agua y Energía* (Water and Energy Company), which was seen on more than one occasion by Army troops. Consequently, the command of V Infantry Brigade was forced to install a surveillance radar in the combat area, which worked 24 hours a day. On one occasion, the *Jilguero* almost shot down an Army UH-1H during a night flight. As the UH-1H was arriving back at its base after a reconnaissance mission, its crew detected the lights of an unidentified helicopter and reported it to the base. Upon listening to the radio information issued by the pilot, a second UH-1H, which was also returning from the mountains, turned in search of the intruder. Once in the area, the second UH-1H was fired upon by the first UH-1H, in the belief that it was the intruder helicopter, forcing it to abort the mission. Once back on the ground, crew members and technicians were able to see the holes in the fuselage made by 'friendly fire'. It proved impossible to find the *Jilguero*, as once it was detected, the high command of the insurgents decided to remove it from the area for safety.

During August, the People's Revolutionary Army received an unexpected reinforcement, when the *Montoneros* group made its appearance in the theatre of operations.

Shortly after *Operativo Independencia* was launched, the FAA had deployed combat units to guard *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in Tucumán, a mission that was complemented with logistical support flights and the relief of troops every 30 days. The transfer of the troops was entrusted to C-130 Hercules, Sud Aviation SE-210 Caravelle and Fokker F-27 aircraft of I Air Brigade, which had to relieve a total of 100 troops every month in order to commit the greatest number of personnel possible and avoid the attrition of those who fought in the area.

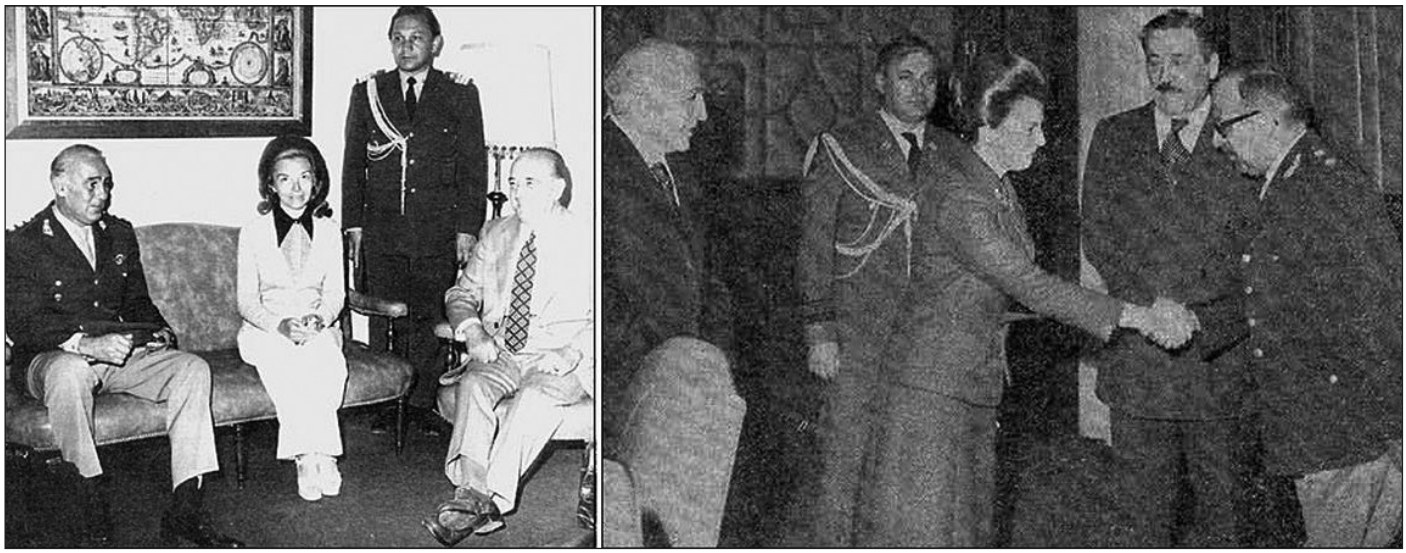
Operativo Independencia was the baptism of fire for the B45 (T-34A) Mentors. Four armed Mentors and the Douglas HC-47A serial TC-37, the latter for logistical support, were deployed to the Military Aviation School (*Escuela de Aviación Militar*, EAM) aerodrome. Orders were received only one day before, with the mechanics having only one night to paint the camouflage scheme on the aircraft that had been designated to carry out counterinsurgency missions. Not all the Mentors assigned to this role were painted during the course of the conflict, as planes with a bare metal colour scheme were also deployed.

The Mentors operated from the EAM to maintain the greatest possible discretion, only landing at *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in Tucumán to refuel. The most common missions carried out by the Mentors were the launching of smoke bombs to mark targets, which allowed other aircraft to attack specific locations, strafing and bombing with 50kg PG bombs and launching SCAR rockets using 4MB rocket launchers on objectives to be later recovered by the Army. Joint operations were also carried out with the Army's UH-1Hs in air support missions during the landing of heliborne troops. Each mission usually comprised pairs of aircraft, which carried out between four and five missions per day. Hughes 369HM helicopters of the 7th Helicopter Group acted as forward air controllers (FACs) in combat operations, helping the B45s with communications to reach their targets.

The participation of the B45s in the theatre of operations continued until approximately October 1976, and no Mentors were shot down in combat. It is important to note that the counterinsurgency squadron of VII Air Brigade had been carrying out intense preparation since 1970, with continuous deployments to the north of the country to adapt to the prevailing conditions in the event of a war against the regional insurgency, as indeed happened.

The Mentors began to participate in counterinsurgency missions from February 1975. Like their counterparts in Morón, the missions carried out included armed reconnaissance and ground attack operations, the protection of Army convoys and launching of smoke bombs. When the IA-58 Pucará began operating in December 1975, the Mentors were used to mark their targets. Missions carried out for this purpose by Mentors serial E-062 and E-060 were a constant during the operation of the IA-58s. During May of the same year, Mentor serial E-089 was lost in an accident, with the death of its pilot, Ensign Juan C. Lóperz. In 1975, the EAM had 29 aircraft on strength.

Aerial combat missions for *Operativo Independencia* continued throughout 1976, in the course of which the EAM lost two aircraft in the province of Tucumán: the first in March, E-006 accidentally crashing, killing pilot Lieutenant N.N. Aguirre, followed in April with the loss of E-036, although its pilot was uninjured.



In a change in Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Leandro Anaya (left) submitted his resignation, being replaced by Lieutenant General Alberto Numa Laplane (right) in May 1975. (Open Source)

The *Montonero* Attack on the Destroyer D-2 ARA *Santísima Trinidad*

In August 1969, the ARA commissioned the construction of two Type 42 guided missile destroyers from the British shipyards of Vickers. They received the names D-1 ARA *Hércules* and D-2 ARA *Santísima Trinidad*. The second of the ships was delivered in the form of unassembled sections and equipment, which was assembled in the local shipyard AFNE Río Santiago (*Astilleros y Fábricas Navales del Estado*, State Shipyards and Naval Factories) at Ensenada in the province of Buenos Aires.

Santísima Trinidad had a displacement of 4,820 tons and was manned by a 287-strong crew. The ship was equipped with several kinds of radar – air, surface, navigation, search and attack. It had a COGOG gas propulsion system, which combined two 50,000hp Rolls Royce Olympus TM38 turbines and another two 9,900hp Olympus Tyne RM1A turbines, which allowed it to reach speeds of 30 and 18 knots, respectively, as well as a range of 4,500 nautical miles at 18 knots. The ship was armed with a twin launcher for 22 Sea Dart Mk.30 surface-to-air missiles, one 115mm Vickers 4.5in/55 Mk.8 gun, two 20mm Oerlikon Mk.7 cannons, four Exocet MM38 surface-to-surface missile launchers, six (2x3) ILAS3/324mm torpedo launchers and Whitehead A244 torpedoes (with a range of 6km at 30 knots). It also had a rear platform for a Westland Sea Lynx helicopter or equivalent.

On 22 August 1975, tactical divers of the *Arturo Lewinger* platoon of the *Montoneros*, led by Máximo Nicoletti, placed a gelamon bomb under the destroyer's hull on a piling of the dock to which the ARA *Santísima Trinidad* was moored. The bomb was activated later and the explosion caused a partial sinking. The ship was shaken and began to sink due to serious structural damage. The destroyer rested on the riverbed, and there it remained, semi-submerged, until it was refloated in September. Although the damage was significant, the ship was refloated and repaired, but with considerable delay to the original delivery date. Its construction was not completed until 29 November 1980, when a series of test navigations began off the Buenos Aires coast. Then on 1 April 1981, it set sail from *Puerto Belgrano* Naval Base to Portsmouth, England. Once there, it was fitted with its operational systems, including the launching system of the Sea Dart missiles. It returned to Argentina in November that year to finally be incorporated into the sea fleet during the following month. Ironically, just months after being fitted out in Britain, the *Santísima Trinidad* took part in the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, the British dependency in the South Atlantic.

A few months after their attack on the *Santísima Trinidad*, on 14 December 1981, the *Montoneros* placed explosive charges on the yacht ARA *Itatí* of the Navy High Command, a vessel frequently used by Admiral Massera. Serious damage was caused, but *Itatí* was successfully repaired.

ERP Attacks in Córdoba

On 8 August, at a press conference held in the Police Department of the province of Córdoba, its head, Commissioner General Inspector Alberto Luis Choux, publicly announced the capture of Marcos Osatinsky, known as *El Pelado*, and Horacio Mendizábal, known as *Hernán*, two leading chiefs of the *Montoneros*. They had been wanted since their escape from Rawson prison in 1972. The ERP tried unsuccessfully to free them during attacks that took place in Córdoba starting on 20 August. Osatinsky and other members of his family were later killed by the police.

Tactical Plan No. 5 was implemented on 16 August, with the concentration of forces towards areas where a guerrilla presence was suspected. On Wednesday 20 August, the ERP unleashed an unprecedented wave of violence in the city of Córdoba. The attacks began at 11:20 a.m., when the *Decididos de Córdoba* company, under the command of Enrique Gorriarán Merlo, tried to occupy the Central Police Headquarters and the adjoining Information Division, in a punitive action that targeted the entire staff.

The ERP insurgents used FAL rifles and explosives, which caused several deaths among the police officers. At the same time, they attacked the Municipal Emergency Hospital and every police patrol car in the area. In view of the seriousness of the situation, immediate help was requested from the armed forces, which arrived at 1:00 p.m., with vehicles and troops of IV Airborne Brigade under the orders of General Rodolfo C. Mujica.

The action seemed to have ended after three hours of fighting, leaving five policemen dead and eight injured, some of them seriously. However, at 5:30 p.m., it resumed when the governor of the province was preparing to give a press conference, snipers stationed on the rooftops of buildings on Ambrosio Olmos, Leopoldo Lugones and Amadeo Sabattini Avenues opening fire on Government House, forcing personnel there to take cover. Joint actions by Army troops and police officers eventually pushed back the attackers, who fled the scene. ERP

Manchalá School, scene of a fierce combat between 40 Argentine Army troops and 140 ERP guerrillas. The fierce resistance of the Army personnel caused the subversives to flee, having suffered several casualties (top). Army soldiers with a Unimog truck (below). (Open Source)

attacks continued during the following days against isolated police and civilian targets, mainly using snipers from the roofs of buildings.

New Army Commander

By Decree No. 2,291, dated 27 August 1975, President Isabel de Perón appointed Brigadier General Jorge Rafael Videla as General Commander of the Argentine Army, replacing Lieutenant General Alberto Numa Laplane. The new chief of the Army, together with his counterparts from the ARA and the FAA, declared that the fight against terrorist subversion would be a priority issue for all the nation's military institutions.

Meanwhile, subversive attacks continued, mainly in the capital and in the province of Buenos Aires, with explosives placed in stores, coffee shops, pubs, police stations, Army installations, universities and private homes of retired military officers. Meanwhile, the Federal Police continued to arrest people suspected of such attacks across the country.

Operación Gardel

On 28 August 1975, the FAA C-130E Hercules, serial TC-62, was parked on the platform of *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in Tucumán waiting for a contingent of Gendarmerie troops. Its crew was made up of its commander, Vice Commodore Héctor A. Cocito, the copilot, Major Carlos J. Beltramone, navigator Captain Francisco F. Mensi, mechanics NCO Fortunato Barrios and Chief Corporal Eduardo Fattore, and loadmasters José Perisinotto and Clyde Pardini. Once in the cabin, they took their positions and, when fastened into their seats, began routine pre-flight checks while outside, the tanker truck completed the loading of the auxiliary fuel tanks and proceeded to remove its hoses. They had arrived that same morning, coming from El Palomar AB, headquarters of I Air Brigade, bringing with them 85 members of the Federal Police and operational equipment for V Infantry Brigade. They left at 9:00 a.m. and, after a smooth journey, landed at Tucumán at 11:56 a.m.

While the crew was doing the pre-flight checks, 114 gendarmes belonging to the 25th *Jachal* and 26th *Barreal* squadrons, both units of the San Juan Combat Team, disembarked from their Unimog trucks and formed two lines ready to board the plane. They had just completed their service in the forests and in the streets of the main towns in Tucumán, under the orders of the Army's V Infantry Brigade. In addition to transporting the Gendarmerie squadrons to San Juan, the Hercules was to then go to La Rioja to carry out a second transfer of troops, in this case to Buenos Aires, complying with a directive of the Army high command.

The *Montoneros* high command had decided to carry out an attack against the FAA, shooting down an aircraft while it transported troops. They had set up surveillance posts at the Tucumán airport in March of that year and saw the frequent movement of military aircraft ferrying troops. The insurgents placed a powerful explosive in a drainage pipe that passed under the runway, which would be detonated by remote control when an aircraft was taxiing for take-off. They prepared 160kg of explosives, consisting of 5kg of TNT, 60kg of dietamon and 95kg of ammonite. The *Montoneros* named the attack *Operación Gardel* in allusion to the tragic death of the great Argentine tango singer Carlos Gardel on a Ford Trimotor that was about to take-off on 24 June 1935 in Medellín, Colombia. The terrorists worked quietly, disguised as employees of the *Agua y Energía* company, so as not to arouse suspicions among the security forces or the populace. The attack was carried out by the *Montonero* guerrilla Juan Carlos Alsogaray, son of the retired General Julio Alsogaray.

At 1.00 p.m., the Hercules positioned itself at the northern end of the runway and waited for clearance from the control tower to take-off. The subversives were carefully monitoring the movements of the aircraft and had already armed the bomb with a detonator. Once authorisation was received from the control tower, the TC-62 began to roll at maximum speed, reaching 200km/h, and some 800 metres along the runway it began to take-off. It was at that very moment that the explosives were detonated. The force of the explosion was so intense that the aircraft tilted downwards and hit the runway hard; it spun 90º and finally crashed on the side of the runway, ending up facing in the opposite direction. The explosion produced a crater 13.5 metres in diameter and some three metres deep, generating a dense column of smoke that was seen several kilometres away. After the initial shock of the explosion, those on board immediately began to evacuate the aircraft. However, the exit doors were locked and a fire then started due to a massive fuel spill. An emergency hatch was opened in the crew's flight deck, and in the cargo compartment the gendarmes managed to open a hole through which some could get out amidst the confusion, smoke and flames. Those who were able to get out first virtually unscathed returned to the aircraft to help those still inside.

Rescue teams from the airport, military and even civilians joined the rescue efforts, while the Hercules was consumed by fire. The explosion of the fuel tanks and the ammunition on board made rescue attempts both difficult and risky. Ambulances evacuated the seriously injured and the dead, with the wounded admitted to various hospitals in Tucumán. Six of those on board lost their lives in the attack: 1st sergeants Pedro Yánez and Juan Riveros and gendarmes Marcelo Godoy, Juan Luna, Evaristo Gómez and Raúl Remberto Cuello. There were also 34 people wounded, 10 of them seriously. The Hercules was completely destroyed and the runway was left unusable. The attack marked a historic milestone, being the first ever shooting down of an aircraft of the FAA.

President's Sick Leave

In the early morning of 2 September 1975, a *Montoneros* terrorist commando detonated a powerful explosive charge that destroyed and set fire to several apartments in a building in Buenos Aires, causing

Guerrillas from the ERP's *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company in a camp in the middle of the Tucumán jungle in 1975. (Open Source)

the death of Celia Palacios de Medina and her 13-year-old daughter, Gladys, who lived on the first floor. Celia's husband, Antonio Medina, who was the doorman of the building, only escaped because he had been hospitalised with a heart condition. The ground floor of the building contained a hairdresser's salon which had previously been frequented by President Isabel de Perón.

On 10 September, President Perón sent a statement to the National Congress requesting 45 days of leave, citing health reasons. Having been subjected to intense pressure, particularly due to the tension surrounding the departure of López Rega and the recent military crisis, her health had broken down and she was subject to acute stress, all of which ended up taking a toll on her metabolism. Under the advice of her doctors, she had already taken a week off in Mar del Plata, but by not delegating command her health continued to suffer.

In a private meeting, President Perón met with the commanders of the armed forces and informed them of her decision. Two days later, in a ceremony held in the White Room of the Casa Rosada, Dr Ítalo Argentino Lúder, who was the president of the Senate, temporarily assumed the presidency. Perón then travelled to Ascochinga, a town 60km north of Córdoba, where she stayed in a hotel with the wives of the three commanders of the armed forces.

The Combat at Potrero Negro

In mid-September, the ERP organised a new platoon after the casualties it had experienced throughout the year. They installed a camp in the Quebrada de Artaza, an area in the middle of the forests that was difficult access, from where they planned to launch fresh attacks. Despite this, the government's intelligence services detected the place and FT Aconquija was mobilised with a total of 120 troops, who moved towards the sector with the help of civilian guides. Following the course of the Cerda and Tortorilla rivers, there were clashes in Laureles Norte, Arroyo Machado, Santa Lucía and Tres Almacenes, where the guerrillas suffered up to 20 casualties despite their new tactic of setting fire to the sugar cane fields to hinder the advance of the regular forces.

Around the same time, Argentine Army forces seized the Quebrada de Artaza camp, also known as *Chupadero de Aguas Hediondas* (stinking water sucking hole), which was a heavy blow for the insurgents. As they advanced, they found the mangled body of a guerrilla fighter who had been killed by one of their own booby traps, along with other signs that the enemy had suffered heavy losses.

On 31 August, an action took place at Las Carboneras, where a Unimog truck of Task Force Aconquija was ambushed and suffered several casualties, among them the sergeant major in charge, although none of them were fatal.

Five days later, two sections of B Company from the same task force were returning to their bases, leaving the mountainous area behind them. They had to march 3km to Potrero Negro, where motorised units were waiting to pick them up. Adopting precautionary measures, the head of the 2nd Section, Sub Lieutenant Rodolfo Hernán Berdina, arranged to advance a patrol as a vanguard, with which he planned to maintain radio contact, while they moved towards Potrero Negro. However, the vanguard ran into an enemy outpost, leading to an intense combat that forced its members to throw themselves to the ground. Hearing the shots, Berdina ordered an advance of the remainder of his troops and ran through the thicket, defying danger. He was struck in the chest by a 9mm bullet, as was soldier Ismael Maldonado, who was running behind him. His deputy, meanwhile, ordered the area to be hit with shrapnel fire, while several jeeps that were waiting for the troops in Potrero Negro recklessly approached to provide cover for the troops under fire. Private Maldonado died instantly, and although Berdina was rushed from the battlefield seriously wounded, he too died in the UH-1H helicopter which was transferring him to San Miguel de Tucumán. Several days later, two UH-1Hs recovered the bodies of three soldiers who were killed in the combat. On some occasions, rescue missions carried out by UH-1Hs were at great risk, operating at night.

Given the increasing number of armed confrontations, General Vilas arranged to reinforce his troops in September with two new task forces to increase the harassment of the enemy, who, despite the magnitude of the latest actions, were beginning to show some weakness. On 23 September, police officers killed three insurgents in Los Laureles. The following day, in another clash at Yacuchina, a fourth subversive was killed. A week later, loyalist and guerrilla forces clashed at the intersection of routes 333 and 38, and almost at the same time a further encounter took place in Río Colorado, with a total of five insurgent deaths in both actions.

Between 1 October and 20 December, Tactical Plan No. 6 was initiated. This was practically the final stage of the military operations against the guerrillas, who had been defeated in all the combats they entered into but were still showing some minimal signs of activity.

Operación Primicia

The bloodiest action during October took place outside Tucumán, when the *Montoneros* group attacked the 29th Mountain Infantry Regiment *Coronel Ignacio José Javier Warnes*, based in Formosa, in what was possibly the best-planned armed operation of the anti-insurgent war, *Operación Primicia* (Operation Novelty). It revealed the operational capacity of the *Montoneros*, the level of preparation of its cadres, its volume of fire and the support it was providing to the ERP, although the operation failed miserably.

In Buenos Aires, the *Montoneros* leadership, headed by Mario Eduardo Firmenich and Fernando Vaca Narvaja, planned the operation meticulously, but the main strategist of the attack was Raúl Clemente Yager, known as *Roque*, *El Gringo* or *Mario*. The operation was commanded by Mario Lorenzo Koncurat, known as *El Jote* or *Sebastián*. The *Montoneros* recruited 200 of their most determined fighters to take part, 70 of whom would be involved in direct action. The different columns of the cell left Buenos Aires, Rosario, Santa Fe, Resistencia and the city of Formosa itself, to converge jointly on the objective.

At 3:15 p.m. on 5 October, the *Aerolíneas Argentinas* Boeing 737-287C, registration LV-JNE – christened *Ciudad de Trelew* – flight AR706, bound for Formosa with a stop in Corrientes, took off from *Jorge Newbery* Metropolitan Airport in Buenos Aires. Its crew comprised Commander Diego Bakas (a retired Naval Aviation frigate

The Minister of Social Welfare of the Cámpora, for the Juan Perón and Isabel Perón administrations, José López Rega, known as *The Sorcerer*, head of the far-right Triple A paramilitary organisation, was finally forced to resign in July 1975. (Open Source)

lieutenant), First Officer Amílcar Fernández and four flight attendants – Barbara Koch, Cristina Font Olivares, Horacio Mateazzi and Carlos Alberto Flores – with 102 passengers on board, among them a group of seven *Montoneros*. Their task was to hijack the aircraft and, once they landed at *El Pucú* International Airport in Formosa, evacuate all the *Montoneros* fighters who had been involved in an operation against the Argentine Army's 29th Infantry Regiment.

Meanwhile on the ground, a perfectly timed operation was launched in which 19 insurgent vehicles took up positions on a side road, waiting for the Boeing's arrival. Meanwhile, subversive groups wearing military uniforms proceeded to stop every motorist who passed through the area, seizing some of their vehicles in case they could be used during the attack. In mid-flight, the terrorists launched their mission, leaving their seats and brandishing their weapons as they seized the flight deck. One of the hijackers, who had technical aviation knowledge, ordered the pilot to turn off the transponder, thereby preventing the pilot from entering the hijacking code '7500'. He then ordered the pilot to proceed to Formosa directly, cancelling a planned stop in Corrientes. At the same time, another insurgent group stormed Aero Club Chaco in Resistencia and seized a Cessna 182D Skylane, registration LV-HOT, kidnapping its pilot, Guillermo Alberto Schmidt.

The rebels took control of *El Pucú* Airport in Formosa, engaging in combat with four members of the VI Gendarmerie Group who were stationed there and the occupants of a police patrol car that had just arrived at the scene. In the confrontation, one of the gendarmes, Assistant Sergeant Falcón, was seriously injured, while police officer Neri Argentino Alegre was killed as he sent a warning to his superiors. By then, the control tower was in the hands of the *Montoneros*, who mounted a heavy machine gun there, with which they planned to cover the arrival of the Boeing.

At the nearby 29th Mountain Infantry Regiment (RIM 29) headquarters, meanwhile, no one was aware of what was happening at the airport. The personnel who had not left the base were enjoying a pleasant Sunday afternoon, dedicated to various activities. However, intelligence information had been received that the *Montoneros* were imminently going to attack a military objective, and a conscript, Luis Roberto Mayol (known as *Ricardo* within the *Montoneros*), who was doing his military service with RIM 29, was also suspected of being an infiltrator. Consequently, the guard at the military base was reinforced and an HMG was installed to help repel any attack. The 29th Regiment was commanded by Colonel Dardo Argentino Oliva. It was the most important combat unit in the Chaco region and, like most of the country's garrisons, was organised into four companies – Command, A, B, and Services. The regiment also had an officers' casino, another for NCOs, a central guardroom, ammunition depot, mechanical workshop, car park, kitchen, dining room, water tank, boiler, training field and parade ground.

Minutes before the 737 of *Aerolíneas Argentinas* landed at Formosa, a PA-31-310B Navajo, registration LV-JXM, of the government of Formosa touched down at the airport. It had on board the government comptroller, Juan Carlos Taparelli, and four public officials, in addition to pilot Julio César Maluf. When they heard shots as the action erupted, they lay face down under the Navajo, but the insurgents forced them to go to the central hall of the airport, where the rest of the captives were being held. The hijacked Boeing landed around 5:00 p.m., covered from the control tower and other strategic points where the *Montoneros* had stationed their troops. Once on the ground, the passengers were forced to disembark and concentrate in the main building, under armed guard, while the crew remained on board. The 737 was refuelled with 6,344 litres of JP1 fuel.

Once the airport was completely controlled by the guerrillas, a *Montonero* column set out for the RIM 29 base. When they reached the barracks, the infiltrator Mayol approached Gate No. 2 and immobilised the guard, after which he flung open the gates to let in the attackers. A violent battle then ensued, with the conscript soldiers putting up unexpectedly strong resistance. The terrorists attacked the NCOs' casino with grenades, killing one soldier and wounding three others. Immediately afterwards, they tried to seize the officers' mess and the HMG stationed in the *Plaza de Armas* (main square), but alerted by the shooting and explosions, several officers who had been resting jumped out of their bunks and went outside, shooting at the insurgents who were struggling to enter the arsenal. Sub Lieutenant Ricardo Massaferro and an assistant soldier who worked in the offices of Company A died after receiving splinters from a grenade explosion, while several of the conscripts who were with them suffered minor injuries.

The battle became particularly hard-fought at the quarters of the Service Company, which the subversives also attacked with grenades. Despite the fact that one conscript was killed and another seven wounded, the soldiers offered stout resistance and forced the attacking group to withdraw. When the guerrillas tried to seize the armoury adjoining Company A, the battle reached horrific proportions, even in the distant guard post, where 1st Sergeant Víctor Sanabria was killed. During the fighting, Mayol, the traitor who had given the subversives access to the base, was killed by Sub Lieutenant Jorge Ramón Cáceres, a service officer who had assumed the defence of the sector and had just seen five conscripts die when a grenade exploded while they were sleeping. Cáceres managed to retreat along with several other soldiers, killing two guerrillas on the way. At that point, the government forces had disabled five of the six vehicles that entered the barracks, killing several guerrillas, but not without paying a high price in their own lives.

Realising that the situation in the base had become unsustainable, the surviving *Montoneros* abandoned the objective, some on board

An Argentine Army UH-1H armed with rocket launchers. Powerful lamps installed for night operations can also be seen (left). Also shown is a detail of the rocket launchers on a UH-1H of the Argentine Army Aviation (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

Displacement of Army troops along a provincial road in Tucumán. (*Ejército Argentino*)

the vehicles that were still operational and others on foot while being fired upon by the surviving defenders. All the insurgents took with them as booty were 50 FAL rifles, a meagre result for such a large-scale operation.

The bodies of 12 guerrillas were left on the battlefield, but it was impossible to determine just how many others had been wounded or escaped. The Army also lost 12 men in the attack on the base: Sub Lieutenant Ricardo E. Massaferro, 1st Sergeant Víctor Sanabria and conscript soldiers Antonio Arrieta, Heriberto Avalos, José Coronel, Hermindo Luna, Dante Salvatierra, Ismael Sánchez, Tomás Sánchez, Edmundo Sosa, Marcelino Torantes and Alberto Villalba. Nineteen of their comrades were injured, some seriously.

Once at the airport, Captain Bakas was ordered to move the 737 to the southern end of the runway and to get ready for take-off. The Cessna 182 was also made ready to take-off, piloted by Yaguer. The surviving *Montoneros* hastily boarded both planes and fled. To distract attention from their true course, the Cessna 182 called the air traffic control in Resistencia, pretending to be flight AR706 and reporting they were flying to Puerto Iguazú, while the 737 initially headed east, flying over Paraguayan territory, before turning south. Once they reached Villa Ocampo in the province of Santa Fe, the subversives ordered Captain Bakas to descend to 4,000ft and head for Rafaela. Once there, the Boeing turned towards the neighbouring town of Angélica, where the *Montoneros* had prepared a 2,000-metre unpaved runway. The hijackers ordered Bakas to land with the gear retracted, but the pilot lowered the landing gear at the last moment, while on the final approach, wanting to save the aircraft from serious damage. This action almost cost him his life, as the insurgents threatened to shoot him. The 737 finally landed at 6:40 p.m.; when it came to a halt, the landing gear had buried itself in the ground due to the weight of the jet, but without causing significant damage to the aircraft.

The unusual sight of a jet landing on the makeshift runway alerted the residents of the area and they called the police, who immediately showed up, leading to a fire fight with the *Montoneros*. The insurgents eventually managed to flee in vehicles that their logistics group had prepared for their escape. Meanwhile, the Cessna 182 landed in a rice plantation near Nueva Valencia, in the province of Corrientes, where its occupants stole a car and fled.

The *Aerolíneas Argentinas* Boeing 737 remained in Angélica for 20 days. Members of the FAA, *Aerolíneas Argentinas*, the Federal Police, firefighters and civilian teams worked together to allow it to take-off again. A folding metal runway was sent from Ushuaia aboard an FAA C-130 Hercules, which was assembled by specialised teams while airline personnel proceeded to take out the seats, non-vital equipment, galleys and other elements in order to lighten the aircraft. With the minimum amount of fuel necessary for its journey, it was flown to Sauce Viejo Airport, near the city of Santa Fe, where it underwent repairs.

Boeing 737-287C LV-JNE had a very peculiar history. It had been incorporated into the *Aerolíneas Argentinas* fleet in 1971. Two years before the Formosa hijacking, on 20 October 1973, while flying from Buenos Aires bound for Salta in northern Argentina, with 49 passengers on board, a group of four Uruguayan citizens forced the crew to land in Tucumán, where they were denied fuel to fly on to Cuba, instead continuing to Yacuiba in Bolivia. It was also the protagonist of a 'belly landing' at Buenos Aires Metropolitan Airport in 1978 but was repaired and continued to fly. In 1989, flying over the Río de la Plata, the rear door became detached and fell into the void, leading to an emergency landing. Finally, in 1992, the pilot of the jet had to abort take-off at San Luis Airport due to the rupture of the landing gear tyres; the aircraft veered off the runway, caught fire and was totally destroyed, but there were no casualties.

Decrees of the Executive Power to Annihilate the Guerrillas

In October 1975, during the interim presidency of Dr Ítalo Lúder, decrees No. 2770, 2771 and 2772 were issued, through which the police and prison forces were placed under the control of the Defence Council in the fight against the guerrilla groups operating in the country. Likewise, the armed forces were ordered to annihilate the guerrillas throughout the country, not only in Tucumán. The Internal Security Council was also established, chaired by the President, all the ministers of the Executive Branch and the three commanders of the armed forces (Army, ARA and FAA). The decrees gave rise to

Naval Aviation Beechcraft B80 Queen Air serial 4-F-21, which was equipped with infrared sensors to locate guerrilla camps in the Tucumán jungle. For *Operativo Independencia*, camouflage and military markings were removed (as shown left). (COAN).

Aircraft that joined *Operativo Independencia* in 1975: Army Aérospatiale SA.315A Lama (top left), UH-1H (top right), L-21B (bottom left) and Gendarmerie Fairchild Hiller FH-1100 (bottom right). (*Ejército Argentino*/*Gendarmería Nacional*)

The first four IA-58 Pucarás, serials A-501 to A-504, at the Military Aircraft Factory in Córdoba in 1975. (Horacio Gareiso via Vladimiro Cettolo)

The FAA Douglas A-4B Skyhawk serial C-206, fully loaded with bombs. A BAC Canberra bomber can be seen in the background. (Nery Mendiburu via Magnusson)

An FAA Beechcraft B45/T-34A Mentor wearing tactical camouflage applied for close air support operations in *Operativo Independencia* in Tucumán in 1975 (left). (Vladimiro Cettolo). Not all Mentors deployed to the theatre of operations were camouflaged; some of them had the bare metal colour scheme (right). (Jorge Lonardi)

Directive 1/75, to 'Fight against subversion', issued in October of the same year by the Defence Counsel. Section 5 of the directive read:

> The Armed Forces, Security Forces, Police Forces and other bodies placed at the disposal of this Council of Defence, from the receipt of this Directive, will execute the offensive against subversion, throughout the national territory, to detect and annihilate subversive organisations in order to preserve order and the security of property, people and of the State.[5]

Argentina was now at war and was preparing to respond to the insurgents' aggression.

The Combat at Acheral

General Vilas put new tactical plans into practice to surround the guerrillas and prevent their escape, bringing in troops from Mendoza and Salta as reinforcements. However, the enemy was still active, the subversives losing three men on 6 October when confronting a combined squad comprising Army and Tucumán Police personnel. Despite this, the next day they set up an ambush near the Los Sosa River and attacked a military truck that made the journey between Tafí del Valle and Acheral every day, carrying supplies and weapons.

About 30 ERP troops were preparing to take up positions on both sides of the road when they ran into a 14-man group that was patrolling the area. At 6:15 p.m., close to Provincial Route 307, just 5km from Santa Lucía, there was a fire fight in which two soldiers, Juan C. Castillo and Enrique Ernesto Gustoni, both of the class of 54, were killed, as well as one insurgent, while two members of the Army were also injured. The ERP, which later considerably exaggerated the number of adversaries and casualties caused, went into the thicket, closely followed by the military patrol. During this second phase of the action, the guerrilla commander, Jorge Carlos Molina, known as *Capitán Pablo*, and soldier Alfredo Ordóñez, were killed.

On the night of 8–9 October, the ERP suffered another serious blow when it lost 'Captain' Oscar Asdrúbal Santucho, ERP commander Mario's brother, and 'Lieutenant' Manuel Negrín, two important members of the guerrilla high command, killed during a confrontation near the Santa Lucía sugar mill. This forced the guerrillas to close their La Comandancia camp and request reinforcements in arms and men, a delivery that was to take place the following day at the bridge over the San Gabriel creek.

Around 06:00 a.m. on 10 October, the extremists were detected hiding in a sugar cane field. This information was quickly analysed and a combat team was deployed at around 10:30 a.m. to carry out a pincer approach to the target. Parts of the Aconquija Task Force and the Ibatín Task Force were deployed, supported by three UH-1H gunship helicopters. At 11:38 a.m., one of the UH-1Hs, serial AE-412, was ordered to make two low altitude passes to observe the sector. The Huey was piloted by Sub Lieutenant Oscar Delfino and was making its third low altitude pass over the sugar cane field when insurgent troops were detected, and they immediately began to receive fire. The

FAA Douglas HC-47A serial TC-37 was used as a logistics aircraft for the Mentors stationed at the Military Aviation School in Córdoba during *Operativo Independencia*. (Diego Oscar Rojo)

In addition to the extensive use of Army UH-1H helicopters in Tucumán, the FAA deployed Hughes 369s called *Avispas* (Hornets), used in the forward air controller (FAC) role. (Javier Mosquera)

helicopter was hit, damaging its electrical system, and door gunner 1st Corporal Aviation Mechanic José Anselmo Ramírez was killed, with Captain Valiente wounded. The helicopter pilot, also wounded, and having lost radio contact, had no choice but to carry out an emergency landing just 80 metres from where the ERP troops were stationed, touching down rather abruptly in the brush. The guerrillas, estimated at between 90 and 100 troops, quickly encircled the downed helicopter and opened fire on the five surviving crew members. However, the crew put up a stubborn resistance, with no intention of surrendering. Equipped with their personal weapons and the helicopter's two MAG machine guns, they began a desperate resistance, knowing that support was on the way. Another Huey helicopter showed up at noon, swiftly detected the guerrilla positions and launched its 70mm rockets, which started a fire in the sugar cane field. Task forces Aconquija and Ibatín also converged on the objective. Just after 1:00 p.m., another UH-1H helicopter arrived with General Acdel Vilas on board, who advised maintaining their positions while there was daylight, keeping up their fire to wear down the enemy. The fighting lasted until 5:00 pm but most of the rebels escaped. An intense search of the entire area was begun, and 12 subversives were found dead. 1st Corporal Ramírez was posthumously promoted to sergeant. The damaged Huey was later recovered and repaired.

This action proved to be the *coup de grace* for the ranks of the insurrection. Although the war continued until mid-1976, it was limited to evasive actions by the guerrillas and pursuit missions by the armed forces.

October was a decisive month in the battle against the insurgents. The People's Revolutionary Army had experienced hard blows and was beginning to show signs of collapse, which led the high command of the armed forces to assume that the ERP was defeated. So far that year, the ERP had suffered significant casualties, including those of its main commanders; it had lost weapons and equipment and was beginning to become isolated, forcing many of its fighters to leave the area and head for the cities. When the Army occupied the central guerrilla camp on 18 October, followed four days later by its main headquarters, the ERP leadership came to the conclusion that the area had to be urgently decentralised, after a plenary session held in the *El Niño Perdido* camp. Yet despite the hard blows received, the loss of men and the lack of support among the population, the subversion continued to have men willing to do anything for the

The baptism of fire of the IA.58 Pucará: FAA armourer NCOs loading ammunition on a Pucará (above left). A Pucará armed with bombs making a low flight (above right). The IA.58 Pucará serial A-501, is loaded with bombs and rocket launchers, getting ready for an operational sortie (bottom). (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

cause, as evidenced by a night combat at the Fronterita stream on 24 October, when Sub Lieutenant Diego Barceló and conscript Orlando Moya were killed.

On 31 October, a further combat took place at Finca Triviño, where an insurgent column that was moving down the mountainside ran into government forces and lost seven fighters. A week later, in Los Higuerones, 1st Corporal Wilfredo Napoleón Méndez and conscript Benito Oscar Pérez were killed, followed by another NCO, Sergeant Miguel Ángel Moya, killed at Almacén Díaz in Yacuchina on 16 November.

Operación Bumerang Rojo (Operation Red Boomerang)

At the end of October, during a short trip to Mar del Plata, President Isabel Perón suffered a vesicular condition that forced her to be urgently admitted to a medical centre in the federal capital. Some days later, General Benjamín Rattenbach claimed that Perón was in no condition to continue governing. He did so during the monthly camaraderie meeting where a large number of professionals, businessmen and senior officers of the armed forces gathered, on this occasion, under the presidency of General Mario Pozzi. In reference to the serious problems that the country was going through, he said that they were due to six factors: the President herself, the divergences within Perónism, the situation of the CGT union, the state of the economy, moral corruption and subversion. He was followed by General Alcides López Aufranc, who, in addition to ratifying what his comrade said, emphasised that it was imperative to put an end to demagogy in the nation.

The President, for her part, was quite aware of what was happening, and on 6 November issued a statement saying that she would not resign and was not even going to ask for sick leave again. She harshly criticised those sectors that called for her resignation. While all this was happening, the assassinations, bomb attacks, robberies and kidnappings perpetrated by the subversive groups continued.

Meanwhile, for several months, the intelligence services of Chile and Argentina had been on the trail of a clandestine movement, orchestrated by subversive groups from both countries, which, following direct instructions from Cuba, organised an invasion of Chile, with the purpose of assassinating President Pinochet and his main collaborators, among them General Gustavo Leigh, commander of the Chilean Air Force.

Since mid-October, and even before that, the Chilean National Intelligence Directorate (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional,* DINA), as well as the Government Information Directorate (DIG) and the Argentine State Intelligence Service (*Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado*, SIDE), had been exchanging information regarding strange movements that had occurred on both sides of the Andes mountain range. Valuable documentation had been intercepted during recent raids in Argentina, compromising the leadership of the Revolutionary Left Movement (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, MIR), the Revolutionary Coordinating Board (*Junta Coordinadora Revolucionaria* or *Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria*, JCR), the *Montoneros* and the ERP, whose members were preparing to launch a guerrilla invasion of southern Chile. Their deadline for the assault was 10 November. To do this, 1,200 combatants were training in Argentina, while 100 more had already crossed the border, on foot or on horseback, disguised as tourists.

The plan was discovered after the capture and subsequent analysis of a series of documents and messages by the security forces, during raids that took place in various different parts of Argentina. It was made available to the Argentine armed forces, which proceeded, under the joint Argentine-Chilean *Operación Bumerang Rojo* (Operation Red Boomerang), to mount a counteroffensive aimed at aborting the invasion.

After checking the information, both in Santiago and Buenos Aires, it was determined that 40 combatants trained in Cuba had just arrived in Chile. The JCR had recently received a million dollars from Cuba to launch the operation. The Chilean Police (*Carabineros*) detected the first movements on 16 October after a raid in Malloco, a town 30km southwest of Santiago, where the MIR high command was gathered in a farm. During the operation, there was a fire fight in which Dagoberto Osvaldo Pérez Vargas, a high-ranking subversive leader, was killed, while his deputy, Nelson Gutiérrez, was wounded but managed to flee. A third leader, Andrés Pascal Allende, nephew of the deposed socialist President Salvador Allende, had to seek refuge in the Costa Rican embassy, where he remained in asylum until his departure for Cuba. After the clash, the DINA captured a considerable arsenal and compromising documentation that exposed the invasion plan.

Once the plan was detected, the investigations led to Bariloche, where the bulk of the force was preparing to cross the Andean passes. The Chilean government was notified and deployed its forces along the Lonquimay–Llanquihué line, while ordering a series of patrols that ended on 7 November with the following results:

- A total of 100 people had crossed from Argentina to Chile, both on foot and on horseback.
- Another 14 had been arrested.
- Some 1,200 combatants were preparing to cross the mountain range as 'tourists'.
- This action was disrupted jointly with Argentine intelligence.
- A clandestine radio station was detected around Laguna de Icalma or Los Arenales, which transmitted at 3,820 kilocycles (kilohertz) from Chilean to Argentine territory.

The Argentine Federal Police verified that seditious forces in the country used helicopters and even an airplane.

The invasion was aborted, the Malloco operational centre neutralised, its leaders were dead or on the run and the 1,200 guerrillas who were preparing to cross the Andean border from Bariloche were

Two missile-capable Type 42 destroyers were commissioned by the ARA in 1969: D-2 ARA *Santísima Trinidad* (left) and D-1 ARA *Hércules* (right). (*Histarmar Archives*)

The *Montoneros* attack on the D-2 ARA *Santísima Trinidad* damaged the destroyer, but the ship was repaired. (*Histarmar* Archives). The *Montonero* Máximo Nicoletti, who planted the explosives on the ARA destroyer (right). (Open Source)

dispersed, many of them captured or also on the run. The success of this operation was mainly due to the rapid and fluid coordination between the security forces and intelligence units of both countries.

Operación Cacerola (Operation Saucepan)

Retired Major General Jorge Esteban Cáceres Monié and his 53-year-old wife, Beatriz Isabel Sasiain, arrived at their country house in the Villa Urquiza neighbourhood on the afternoon of Friday, 1 December 1975. General Cáceres Monié had been the commander of the Argentine Federal Police in 1971 and the following year was the Commander of II Army Corps based in Rosario.

Two days later, Cáceres Monié and his wife took their pick-up truck, intending to drive to the city of Paraná. They came to a large stream that they had to cross on a small ferry boat. While they were getting on the boat, their truck was hit by a car, from which four armed *Montoneros* guerrillas got out: Mabel Lucía Fontana, known as *Liza*; Tulio Valenzuela, known as *Tucho*; Yofre Newton, known as *Ratita*; and Lino Roqué, known as *El Rubio*. They all opened fire on the general, who died instantly. His wife was wounded. The guerrillas took the general's pick-up truck and kidnapped Mrs Sasiain. Once they got to the opposite shore, they disappeared with their hostage. The ferry boat operator raised the alarm to the police, after which the Army, the Prefecture, the FAA, the Federal Police and its provincial counterpart launched an operation to track down the murderers. They implemented an intensive operation under the command of Brigadier General Luciano Adolfo Jáuregui, commander of II Armoured Cavalry Brigade. On 4 December, the corpse of Mrs Sasiain was found on a secondary road near the city of Paraná. She had been killed by her captors. General Cáceres Monié was posthumously promoted to the rank of lieutenant general.

A pre-coup: *Operación Cóndor Azul* (Operation Blue Condor)

On 18 December, the Commander-in-Chief of VII Air Brigade at Morón Air Force Base (AB), Brigadier Major Jesús Orlando Cappellini, an officer loyal to General Videla, led a rehearsal for a *coup d'état*, known as 'The Blue Condor Command in Operations', to overthrow the commanding general of the FAA, Brigadier General Héctor Fautario, the last of the military chiefs who would not agree to join those planning the coup and the last commander supporting the constitutional government. Cappellini's first action was the arrest of General Fautario, along with three other brigadiers, at *Jorge Newbery* Metropolitan Airport in the federal capital. Fautario and his companions had boarded an FAA Aerocommander AC500 that would take them to the city of Córdoba that day. Waiting on the runway for clearance to take-off, they were surrounded by military

The yacht ARA *Itatí* of the General Command of the ARA was also the subject of a bomb attack by the *Montoneros*. Although seriously damaged, the vessel was repaired. (Open Source)

Two *Montonero* chiefs were captured in Córdoba in August 1975, Marcos Osatinsky, known as *El Pelado* (left), and Horacio Mendizábal, known as *Hernán* (right). (Open Source)

Corporal Rosario Gregorio Moyano
Agent Juan Díaz
Sergeant Juan Carlos Román
Agent Luis Rodolfo López
Agent Jorge N. Luna
The ERP Chief Enrique Gorriarán Merlo

Policemen assassinated by the ERP in the attack on the Central Police Headquarters in the city of Córdoba on 20 August 1975. On the right, the ERP terrorist who led the attack. (CELTYV Archives)

vehicles that blocked their way. All commercial flights arriving at the airport at that time were diverted to Ezeiza International Airport, with the *Aeroparque* being closed. Around 100 rebel troops from the FAA surrounded the entire perimeter of the airport. Upon learning the news, the General Staff of the FAA assigned Brigadier Major José María Klix, who followed Fautario in seniority, in charge of the FAA.

Fautario was imprisoned in the Quilmes Regional Workshop, while the other three officers were taken to Morón. Brigadier Cappellini established his command in Morón AB, headquarters of VII Air Brigade. Shortly after noon, the rebels, at the request of Commodore Discoli, decided to release Brigadier Fautario, who, under heavy escort, was taken to a car that left for the Condor Air Force building in downtown Buenos Aires. Next, a T-34A Mentor from VII Brigade flew over the Casa Rosada, dropping leaflets announcing their objectives. The rebels sought the replacement of the Perónist government by the Army commander, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla, representing the three armed forces. During the afternoon, four armed Mentors made low-level flights over the Condor Air Force building.

Around 11:00 p.m., the rebel command issued several *communiqués* to the population through *LR3 Radio Belgrano*, informing them about the events of the day. At 12:30 a.m. on 19 December, through Decree No. 3871, signed by the President at midday, Brigadier Major Rolando Ramón Agosti assumed command of the FAA. The new commander immediately began talks with Brigadier Cappellini in order to convince him to give up his rebellion but was unable to do so. Meanwhile, Lieutenant General Videla transmitted a radiogram to the entire Army, acknowledging the uprising as an issue for the FAA and not for the Army, not yet being prepared to back a coup.

At 3:00 p.m. on 20 December, Brigadier Agosti ordered the head of Mariano Moreno AB, in the town of José Carlos Paz, to attack the rebel base. He did the same with the commanders of II Air Brigade in Paraná and V Air Brigade in Villa Reynolds. Brigadier Cappellini stated that in the event of being attacked, his command would not fire back or attack their comrades but would fire on the Casa Rosada.[6]

Two Dassault Mirage IIIEA fighters took off from Mariano Moreno AB and headed east to Morón. Once there, they strafed the runway with their DEFA 30mm guns. The fire was returned by the rebels using AA guns. Two more Mirage IIIEAs carried out a second attack, firing Matra rockets. At the same time, two BAC Canberra Mk.62 bombers from Paraná AB, several IA-58 Pucará attack aircraft from Córdoba and Reconquista ABs and A-4B Skyhawks from Villa Reynolds AB were flying towards José Carlos Paz. They all landed at Mariano Moreno AB and, after being refuelled, took off again. The third attack on Morón was led by two A-4Bs and two IA-58 Pucará aircraft, launching LAU 61 rockets at the runway. The fourth attack was carried out by two Canberra bombers, dropping more bombs on the runway. A total of 25 attacks were carried out between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m., leaving one hangar damaged and one Mentor trainer and one helicopter destroyed.

Negotiations between both sides continued on 21 December through the mediation of Monsignor Tórtolo, the Military Vicar. After speaking with Brigadier Agosti until 5:30 p.m., it was revealed that the FAA commander had accepted the proposals of the rebel command,

Brigadier General Jorge Rafael Videla was appointed Army Commander on 27 August 1975. (Horacio Villalobos)

Benjamín Matienzo Airport in the city of San Miguel de Tucumán. (Open Source)

making it clear that Brigadier Cappellini was giving up his uprising and was preparing to hand over the base.

The rebel commanders then surrendered. Once the rebel bases were occupied, the troops were disarmed, the facilities were reconnoitred and their leaders, Brigadier Orlando Cappellini and Commodore Francisco Rodrigo, were arrested. They were taken to the Condor Air Force building, where they were detained until being sent to a military unit.

Although Cappellini failed to overthrow President Perón, he managed to impose a like-minded commander as head of the FAA, a step toward the 1976 coup. Incredibly, Brigadier Capellini remained in active service and no action was taken against the rebels, clearly demonstrating the weakness of the constitutional government.

Monte Chingolo

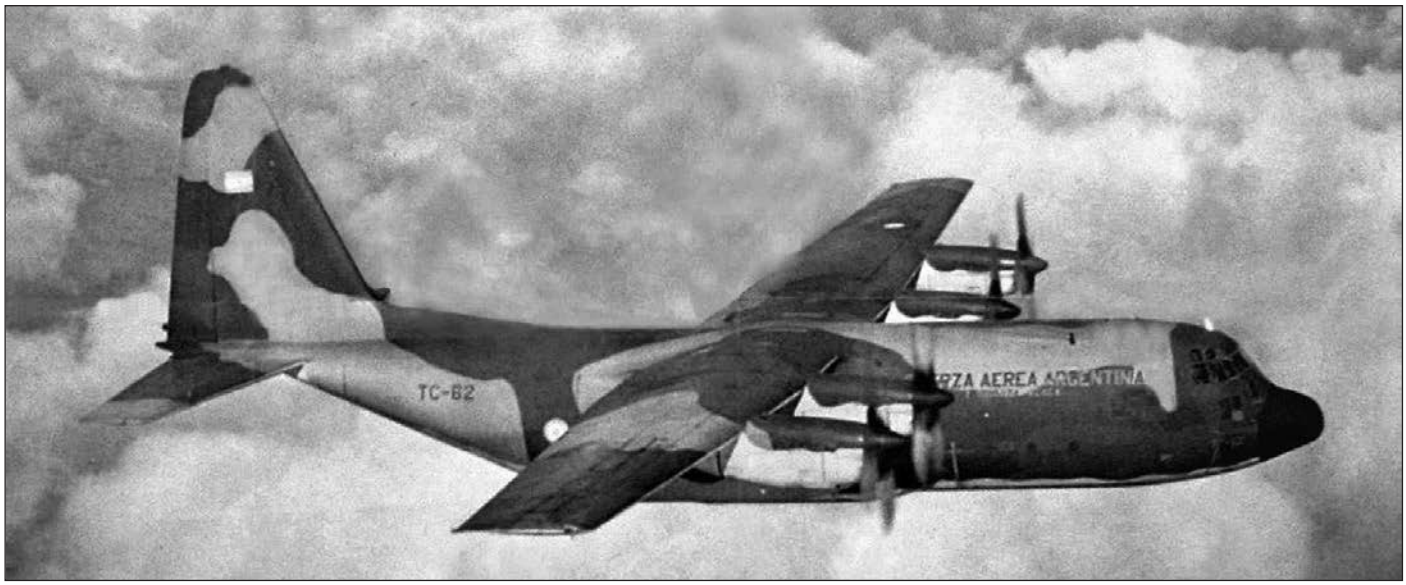
On 23 December 1975, the People's Revolutionary Army carried out the largest operation of the entire counterinsurgency war: an attack on 601st Army Arsenal Battalion *Coronel Domingo Viejobueno* at Monte Chingolo, in the district of Lanús, south of Buenos Aires. The mission was to steal weapons for the rebels' Tucumán front.

The attack was intended to have been carried out on 21 December, after visiting hours, but the pronouncement of the FAA headed by Brigadier Orlando Cappellini had forced a general quartering caused by the resignation of Brigadier Héctor L. Fautario and his replacement by Orlando Ramón Agosti.

Determined to take action, the ERP, allied with the *Montoneros*, held back its urban squads but two days later launched the operation. The following ERP units participated in the attack: the *José de San Martín* Battalion, the *Héroes de Trelew*, *Héroes de 1917*, *Combate de San Lorenzo* and *Decididos de Córdoba* companies, and members of the *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company, who travelled especially to the capital to join the attacking force, totalling 120 combatants. There were also 200 effectives from the *Montoneros* and combatants from smaller units who made up a battle-hardened battalion of 320 men and women determined to do anything for the cause. A total of eight combat groups were organised, each led by an insurgent lieutenant or sergeant, with a specific objective within the attack plan. The ERP was to carry out the direct attack on the military installations, with decoy actions, logistics and health support handled by the *Montoneros*.

The security forces had inserted several infiltrators into the ERP, including Rafael de Jesús Ranier, known as *El Oso*, and Miguel Ángel Laser, known as *Facundo*. The intelligence tasks of the security forces were handled by Intelligence Battalion 601 of the Army, under the leadership of Colonel Carlos Alberto Valín. Ranier was not exactly a 'patriot' helping the government out of loyalty, but rather did it for money, but he eventually paid dearly for the betrayal of his fellow guerrillas. The *Montoneros*, who collaborated with the ERP, had warned of the possibility of an infiltrator in the ranks of the ERP since late 1975, the Army and Federal Police having captured numerous insurgents and seized a large quantity of weapons and compromising documents. Nevertheless, the ERP did not pay much attention to the claims of the *Montoneros* and continued with their plans, while the infiltrators passed key information to the security forces. Army Major Carlos Antonio Españadero met with the infiltrated agents and then took the information to Intelligence Battalion 601. With the data obtained, it was possible to determine that the ERP would attack the Army Arsenal in Monte Chingolo. The high command of the armed forces was immediately informed and a reinforcement of the troops at the Army Arsenal was ordered, given the imminence of a terrorist attack. The intelligence section of the ERP became aware of these military preparations and assumed that the plan to attack the arsenal had been discovered by the Army. Some senior ERP leaders wanted to postpone the action, but their chief, Santucho, insisted that the attack still be carried out.

The head of the Arsenal Battalion, Colonel Eduardo Abud, duly ordered the guards to be reinforced and, together with Major Roberto Barczuk, toured the defensive perimeter, consisting of three strongpoints, each reinforced by a 7.62mm-calibre MAG machine gun, led by four officers with communication equipment. Two positions armed with MGs were placed on the water tanks, which dominated the entire base. Conscripts also dug ditches on both sides of the internal street that led from the main entrance to the Central Guardhouse, to cut off access to enemy vehicles. Foxholes were also dug for individual riflemen, and 15 troops equipped with FAL and FAP rifles and a MAG machine gun were located in the Prevention Guard. Two M113 armoured vehicles were also deployed at both ends of the barracks, each one equipped with a Browning M2 .50-calibre machine gun, the first a few metres from the headquarters and the second at the rear of the building.



The C-130E Hercules, serial number TC-62, of the FAA. (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

Troops of the Argentine National Gendarmerie waiting to board the Hercules TC-62 that fateful 28 August 1975. (*Gendarmería Nacional Argentina*)

The ERP high command had rented a house in Quilmes, where they established their headquarters. From there, Mario Roberto Santucho directed the operation, ordering the hijacking of trucks, vans and buses, and the theft of private cars that the guerrillas intended to use to reach the 601 Battalion base, where they hoped to steal 13 tons of weapons. The insurgents gathered at the house 15 minutes before the hour of attack on 23 December, waiting for the vehicles to be used in the action. The Pérez unit led the way, but when they were 50 metres from the Army base main gate, they came under fire from the guard and an observation tower overlooking the area, troops using several machine guns. Although ERP fighters managed to enter the base with their vehicles, many of them were killed as they got out of their trucks.

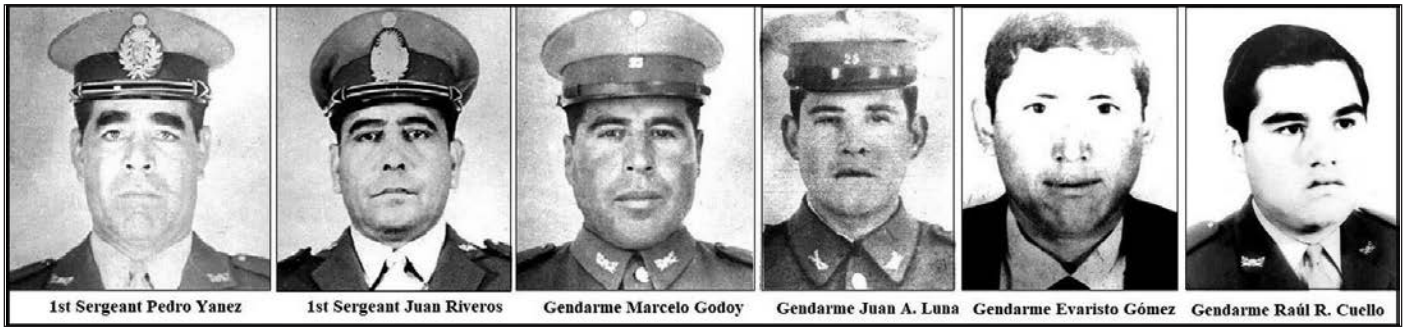
The attack began at 7:00 p.m. when a Mercedes Benz truck violently rammed the main gate to gain access to the base, followed by nine other vehicles packed with combatants. There was a violent exchange of shots, which increased in intensity with the arrival of more guerrillas. The group of 70 insurgents were led by commander Armando Abigail Attademo, known as *Capitán Miguel*, who was assisted by Ricardo Daniel Waisberg, known as *Sargento Diego*, and Liliana Alcira Malamud, known as *Sargento Ana*. Their mission was to capture the strategic points of the arsenal, supported from outside by 200 other combatants. Despite coming under intense fire from the assault, the guard managed to notify Colonel Eduardo Abud, commander of the battalion, who hurried to alert the high command in the federal capital to start the counterattack.

With the guard trying to repel the rebels and the radio operator on duty transmitting appeals for help, the officers' casino was attacked by another group from the rear. The eight subversives who entered from the rear were killed by fire from the machine gun post, supported by an armoured vehicle that advanced on them to fire. At that point, the ERP had cut off all access to the battalion and was carrying out decoy actions on the 7th Infantry Regiment at La Plata and several police stations in different parts of the south of the country (at Bernal, Quilmes, Lanús, Villa Domínico, the Avellaneda Bridge, Bridge 12 on the Ricchieri Highway, Camino Negro, Camino Gral. Belgrano and Camino de Cintura).

Several buses and a couple of trucks were set on fire and used by the guerrillas to obstruct the route to the base. Elsewhere, the General Belgrano train barrier guard at Pasco was forced to lower the barriers and a train coming from the capital had to stop with the passengers forced to get off. Night was slowly falling when UH-1H gunships from VII Air Brigade based in Morón entered the fray. Upon reaching the combat zone, they came under heavy fire, forcing their withdrawal.

At 8:00 p.m., an armoured column from La Tablada reached the Matanza River and began to cross the bridge over Camino de Cintura (Provincial Route 4), where the ERP had placed several cars and lit fuel spilled from a tanker truck. The insurgents fell back when the armoured carriers broke through the blockade. Meanwhile, fighting broke out on Avenida Pasco and the Puente de La Noria, near where a second rebel platoon was stationed. One of its members, Alejandro

The FAA Hercules TC-62 burning at the side of the runway after the explosion (top). Gendarmerie, FAA and firefighter personnel take part in the rescue of the wounded and recovery of the dead from the attack (bottom). (*Gendarmería Nacional Argentina*)



The six members of the Gendarmerie who were killed in the attack on the Hercules TC-62. (*Gendarmería Nacional Argentina*)

Bulit, known as *Juancito*, tried to throw a homemade grenade at the military convoy, but it exploded in his hand, disfiguring his face. Bulit fell to the ground, mortally wounded, while his companions fled and the government column continued its march. At that moment, reinforcement troops from the federal capital, La Plata and La Tablada converged on the arsenal, coming under heavy attack from guerrillas in private houses, on rooftops and from other positions.

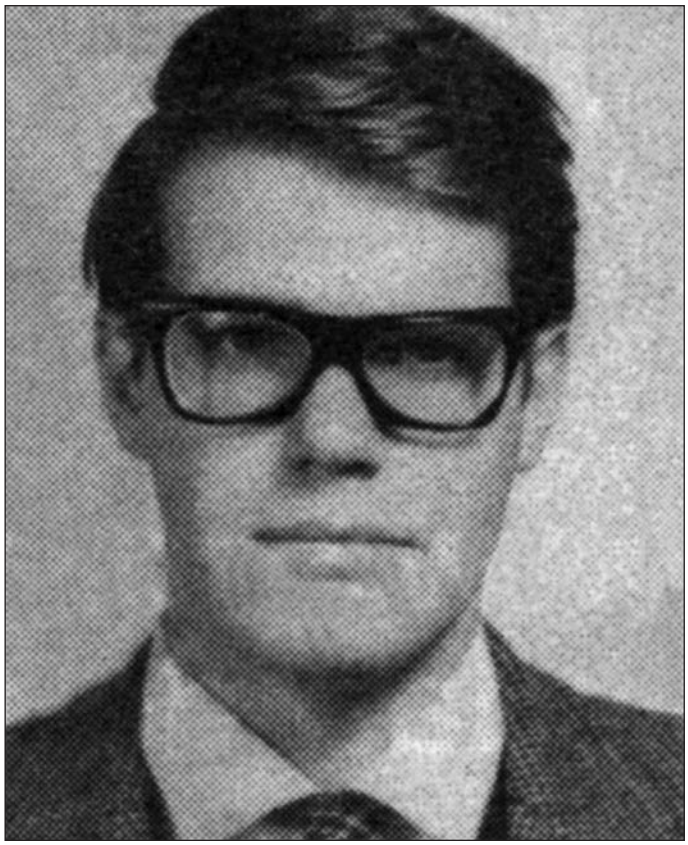
Outside the arsenal, members of the Federal and Buenos Aires Province Police tried to protect the civilians who fled in terror, while people in the neighbourhood locked their doors and windows and stayed inside awaiting the outcome of events.

With the arrival of night, the battle became even more confused. It was then that Canberra bombers of II Air Brigade entered the fray, dropping flares and illumination bombs in order to light-up the area and facilitate the advance of government troops. Behind them, other aerial units carried out observation flights in rotating missions, detecting enemy positions.

By then, reinforcements from the 3rd Marine Infantry Battalion, the National Gendarmerie and the Federal and Buenos Aires Province Police were in place, their numbers and combat ability sealing the fate of the insurgents.

The fighting came to an end at around 11:00 p.m., having taken a tremendous toll: 90 guerrillas were killed, although some sources indicate at least 200,[7] including wounded who were finished off by their own comrades to prevent them from giving vital information to the security forces. Some 30 lightly wounded were evacuated by the insurgents. There were also an unknown number of innocent civilians killed in the vicinity, the true figure never being revealed.

Thirty-four Army personnel were wounded during the attack. Among the Army fatalities were Captain Luis María Petruzzi, who fell when an ERP patrol intercepted him on the Camino de Cintura to seize his truck; 1st Lieutenant José Luis Spinassi, killed when troops of the 3rd Infantry Regiment from La Tablada advanced in support of Battalion 601; Assistant Sergeant Roqué Cisterna, chief of the battalion guard, whose head was smashed with rifle butts; conscripts Benito Manuel Ruffolo and Raúl Sessa; and Navy conscript Enrique Grimaldi, from the 3rd Battalion of the Marine Infantry.



The *Montonero* terrorist Juan Carlos Alsogaray, who detonated the bomb that devastated the Hercules TC-62. The son of retired Army General Julio Alsogaray, he was killed in combat in Tucumán in 1976. (Open Source)

The battle at Monte Chingolo was the heaviest defeat suffered by the rebels. Their goal of seizing the arsenal and taking away 900 Belgian-made FN FAL rifles with 60,000 rounds of ammunition, 100 M16 assault rifles with 100,000 rounds, six 20mm automatic anti-aircraft cannons, 15 Instalaza recoilless cannons with projectiles and 150 light machine guns, failed completely. As a result, the insurgents were left virtually defenceless. Shortly after this resounding defeat, the ERP informant Ranier was discovered by the rebels, forced to confess, and was executed shortly afterwards. In July 1976, fellow informant Laser was also captured and killed by the ERP.

The leadership of the ERP and *Montoneros* blamed the dismal failure of the operation for the harsh defeats suffered in Tucumán and the slow withdrawal towards urban areas. Both guerrilla groups underestimated

President Isabel de Perón (left). Senator Ítalo Argentino Lúder, who assumed the provisional presidency after Mrs Perón's request for temporary leave (right). (Open Source)

the power of the armed forces and mistakenly believed that the common people, especially those whom they called the proletarians, would support them, but who nevertheless unconditionally supported the government forces.

The following armed forces units were involved in repelling the attack on the 601st Arsenal Battalion base at Monte Chingolo:

- A section of the *Patricios* 1st Infantry Regiment from the federal capital, whose troops were armed with FAL assault rifles and anti-tank fragmentation projectiles (PAF), plus Instalaza and Oerlikon cannons.
- A company of the *General Belgrano* 3rd Mechanised Infantry Regiment from La Tablada.
- A section of the 10th Armoured Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron from La Tablada, which included at least four M113 carriers, each with two crew members and 11 men inside.
- A section of the *Coronel Conde* 7th Infantry Regiment from La Plata.
- A section of the Horse Grenadier Regiment.
- Group 101 of the *General Richieri* Anti-Aircraft Defence Artillery (GADA 101) from Ciudadela.
- Artillery Group 1, with 105mm and 155mm howitzers.
- The 8th Tank Cavalry Regiment from Magdalena.
- Part of the *H. Vallejos* Communications Battalion Command 601 of City Bell.

Army troops, with a press cameraman, in the middle of the Tucumán jungle in 1975 (left). An Army camp in a clearing in the Tucumán jungle (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

An ERP camp in Potrero Negro (left). This ERP subversive was killed in a confrontation with the Army (right). (Open Source)

Private Ismael Maldonado and Sub Lieutenant Hernán Berdina (left and right respectively in left image), two of the casualties from the combat in Potrero Negro. Both were evacuated from the scene of the clash in an Army UH-1H (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

Boeing 737-287C, registration LV-JNE *Ciudad de Trelew* of *Aerolíneas Argentinas*, protagonist of the *Montoneros*'s *Operación Primicia*. (Urs Baettig)

- Effectives of the *Viejo Bueno* Arsenal Depot 601 with two M113 carriers, with a Browning M2 machine gun, with officers equipped with Ithaca shotguns and soldiers with FAL rifles.
- Personnel of Intelligence Battalion 601 and the 2nd headquarters of the General Staff, for tracking, interrogation and annihilation of enemy troops.
- A company of Military Police 601.
- Six Army Aviation UH-1H Iroquois helicopters for personnel transport, from Aviation Battalion 601 in Campo de Mayo, with spotlights and MAG machine guns.
- An Army Aviation L-21B Super Cub.
- Five Naval Aviation Aermacchi MB-326GB advanced trainer jets from Punta Indio Naval AB, used in coordination with the Navy's naval operations command.
- A company from the 3rd Marine Infantry Battalion from Río Santiago.
- Two FAA Canberra tactical bombers of II Air Brigade in Paraná, which were used to illuminate the attackers with flares.
- Three FAA Hughes 500D *Avispas* (hornets) helicopters, armed with machine guns, two SA.315B helicopters and a Beechcraft Mentor plane from VII Air Brigade in Morón.
- Mobilisation Detachment 1 of the National Gendarmerie.
- Gendarmerie support units.

Two other aircraft involved in Operation Novelty: the Cessna 182D, registration LV-HOT, which was also hijacked by the *Montoneros* (Saar Air Ross/ Rosario Spotters), and the Piper PA-31-310B Navajo, registration LV-JXM, of the government of Formosa, which landed at Formosa airport during the *Montoneros* attack on the air terminal. (Esteban Brea).

El Pucú (a Guaraní language word meaning 'The Long One') International Airport in the city of Formosa. (Cristian Martínez)

- Two MBB Bo 105A helicopters of the Federal Police.
- Two MBB Bo 105A helicopters, mobile units and armed formations of the Buenos Aires Province Police, including the participation of regional units I, II, III and VII. The police officers awaited the start of hostilities hidden in different posts located to the south of the barracks, between the two guerrilla containment rings. The plan was to attack the rebels' vanguard with Army troops and their rear with police personnel.

In total, about 6,000 men, six M113 carriers, 15 helicopters, nine aircraft and a large number of HMGs and howitzers were mobilised.

Losses in 1975

Throughout 1975, in 37 separate engagements, government forces suffered 53 casualties, in return causing 160 to the enemy (not counting those that occurred during the attacks on the barracks of Infantry Regiment RI 17 in Catamarca and Mountain Infantry Regiment RIM 29 at Formosa), with 58 insurgent camps destroyed and 18 successful ambushes carried out, in addition to taking many prisoners and capturing valuable documentation.

Despite the military successes obtained by General Vilas, both the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla, and the commander of III Army Corps, Brigadier General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez, sought his replacement. The reason perhaps was that Vilas, who was a nationalist, had criticised the liberal economic policy of Martínez de Hoz of the Argentine Business Council, and above all he was also a Perónist.

On 21 December, General Vilas, commander of V Infantry Brigade and of *Operativo Independencia*, was duly replaced by Brigadier General Antonio Domingo Bussi, who had also been appointed governor of the province. General Vilas was recompensed by being made deputy commander of V Army Corps in Bahía Blanca.

On 28 December, the *Montonero* chief Roberto Jorge Quieto, known as *El Negro*, was arrested by members of the Federal Police when he was with his family on a beach. He was taken to a detention centre in Campo de Mayo, where, under torture, he provided key data that led to the capture of numerous guerrillas. For this act, the *Montoneros* leadership sentenced Quieto, but the security forces themselves made him one of the 'disappeared'. Following this event, the leaders of the *Montoneros* mandated the carrying of cyanide pills by all its members; if they feared imminent capture, they were to swallow the pill to kill themselves and thus avoid the danger of them betraying their comrades.

The War in 1976

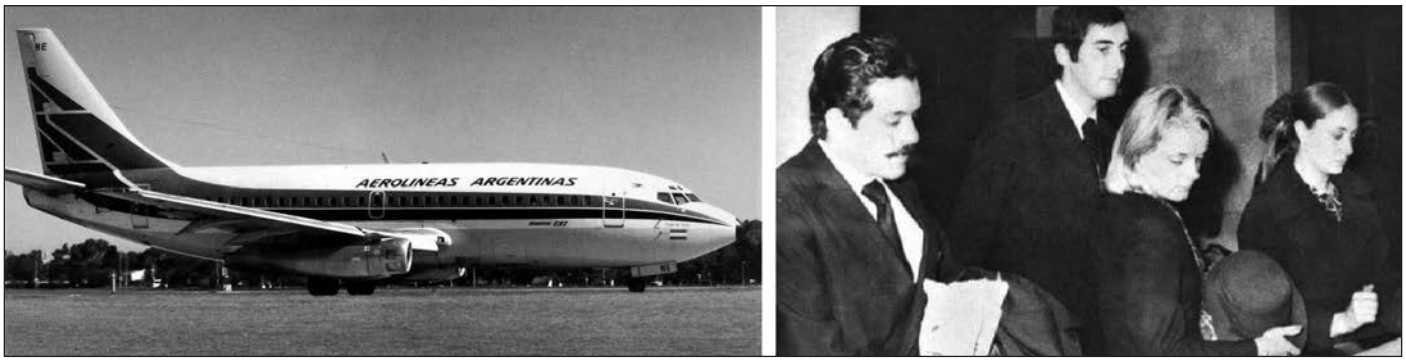
On 29 December 1975, the first measure adopted by General Bussi once in command of V Infantry Brigade was the implementation of *Operación Lamadrid*, which consisted of a series of ambushes and intensive searches to close off any escape route for the guerrillas.

The launch of the operation was hampered by the seasonal rains and high temperatures typical of all subtropical regions at that time of year. However, lengthy journeys and reconnaissance missions were still carried out across the plains, mountains and thickets, capturing one by one the camps and warehouses that the enemy was abandoning.

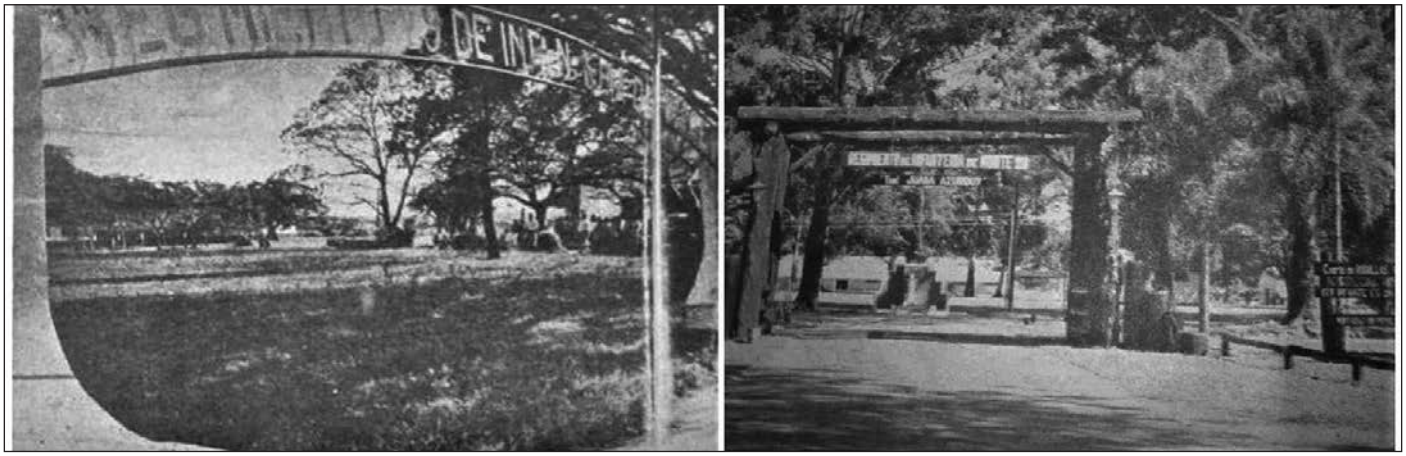
Between 19 and 25 January 1976, the second phase of the plan was launched, consisting of an intensive search through the jungle region near the Salí River and its tributaries, an area widely used by the guerrillas. The third phase began on 27 January and lasted until 25 February, during which 15 ERP camps were destroyed with large quantities of weapons and equipment captured, without any fighting since the enemy avoided confrontation at all costs.

Meanwhile, on 9 January, *Operación Salud* (Operation Health) was put into practice, a pincer movement across the Río Hondo hot springs in which two Army columns, one from San Miguel de Tucumán and the other from Santiago del Estero, intended to box in subversive forces to the southwest of San Miguel. However, the attempts at encirclement were unsuccessful. Despite being unable to capture the subversives or seize quantities of materiel, the area was denied as a base of support for the guerrillas who were operating in Tucumán, through minor actions and patrolling in the towns.

Between 17 January and 28 February 1976, further operations were launched, one which was called *Fanfarria* (Fanfare), with extensive patrols of the Salí River region. There was also *Operación Inmaculada* (Immaculate), in the city of Concepción; *Operación Monteros*, with raids in the town of the same name; *Operación San Miguel de Tucumán*, consisting of massive and selective raids in the provincial capital; *Operación Tafi Viejo* (Old Tafí) and *Albergue* (hostel), with detailed



The Boeing 737-287C of *Aerolíneas Argentinas* hijacked on a flight from Buenos Aires to Formosa by a *Montoneros* commando group (left) (Jorge Lonardi). Part of the 737's crew, Captain Bakas (first from the left) and three flight attendants. (Open Source)



Two of the gates to the base of the 29th Mountain Infantry Regiment in Formosa. (Open Source)

searches in hotels, inns, hostels and pensions that could have been used by the enemy; and *Operación Cerrojo* (Bolt), in which all access routes to San Miguel de Tucumán were blocked.

The Fight at El Cadillal

In view of the recent setbacks it had suffered, the ERP then tried to open two new fronts at Embalse El Cadillal (El Cadillal Dam) and Sierra de Medina, a desperate attempt to maintain its presence in rural areas after repeated failures and the disaster at Monte Chingolo.

By then, the *Montoneros* had sentenced several of their members to death, accusing them of treason and desertion. At the same time, they tried to increase their actions by venturing into the forests to support the ERP. Proof of this was the reconnaissance trip of Juan Carlos Alsogaray, a *Montonero* militant, son of the former Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Julio Alsogaray, and the attack against General Vilas in Buenos Aires, a year after the start of *Operativo Independencia*. On the latter occasion, the military authorities had organised a luncheon at the 1st Infantry Regiment base in Buenos Aires, where the officers planned to honour General Vilas for his brilliant performance at the head of the operation. The *Montoneros* planned his execution, entrusting the mission to the *Pueblo de Tucumán* Platoon, one of whose members, the soldier Miguel Romero, who sympathised with the guerrillas, was to poison the food to be served. However, the strong smell given off by the poisoned dishes alerted the diners and the attempt failed. Once the poisoning was discovered, orders were given to arrest Romero, but the conscript had already left his regiment and vanished without a trace.

It was evident that the ERP Mountain Company had been seriously weakened, and as a consequence its leaders requested reinforcements. The insurgent leadership responded by sending fresh fighters belonging to the *Decididos de Córdoba* Company, which specialised in urban operations. These fierce and fanatical combatants served to raise the morale of the rebels, carrying out operations in El Cadillal, where the Army and police sent numerous patrols and squads.

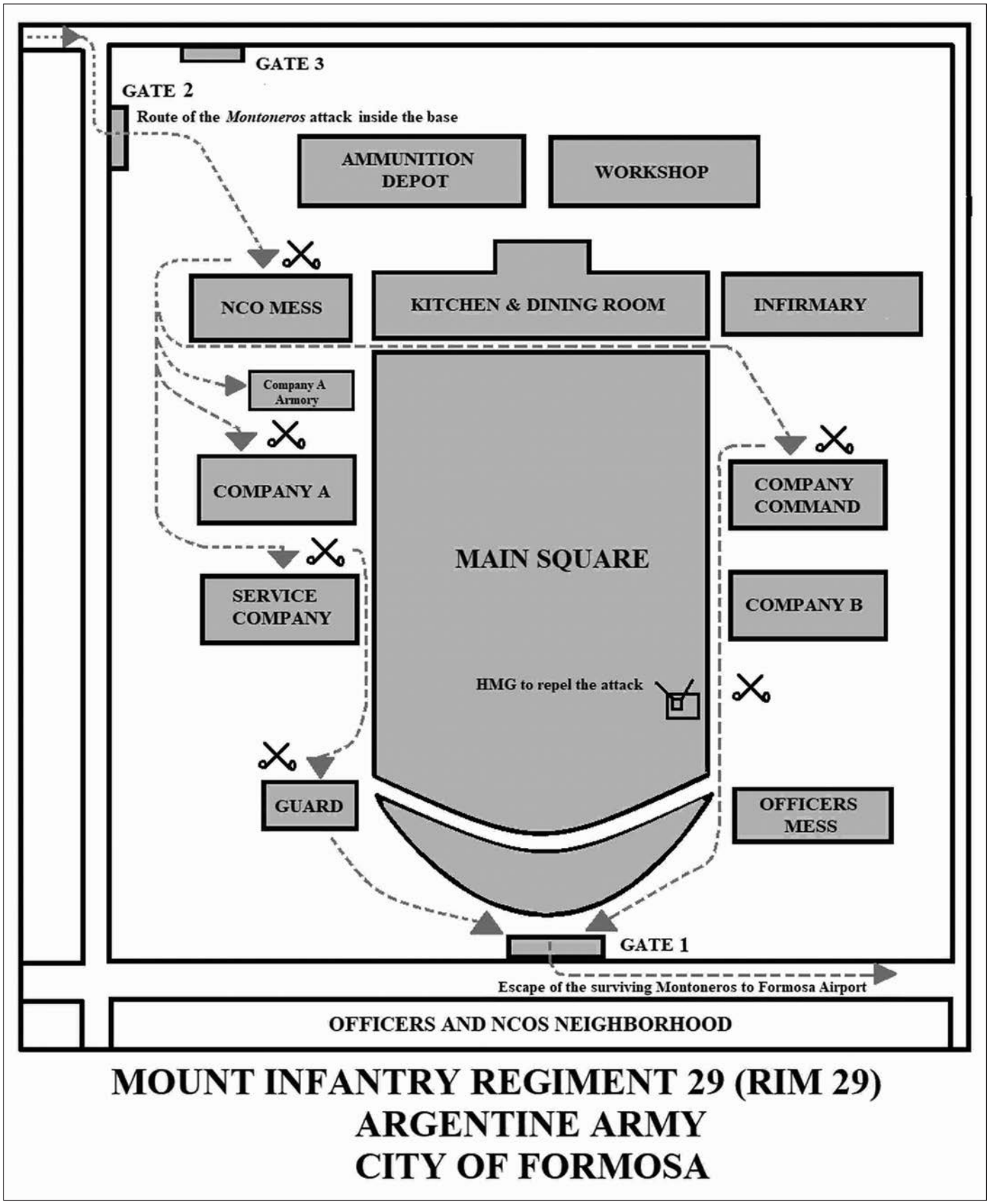
On 19 February, a violent combat took place in the Merendero region when ERP operatives ran into regular forces close to National Route 9 and El Cadillal Dam. In this action, insurgent doctor Eduardo Pedro Palas, known as *Teniente Manolo* or *Médico Loco* (crazy doctor), a veteran of the first operations in Tucumán, was killed, along with Juan Carlos Alsogaray, known as *El Hippie*.

While the guerrillas escaped into the forests, the government forces seized a considerable amount of loot, comprising three FAL rifles, one carbine, nine magazine pouches, 12 backpacks, 11 olive green helmets, eight sleeping bags, seven artillery shells, seven olive green combat jackets, 400 cartridges of 7.62mm calibre ammunition; 300 cartridges of .22 calibre ammunition, medicines, surgical items, crockery and food.

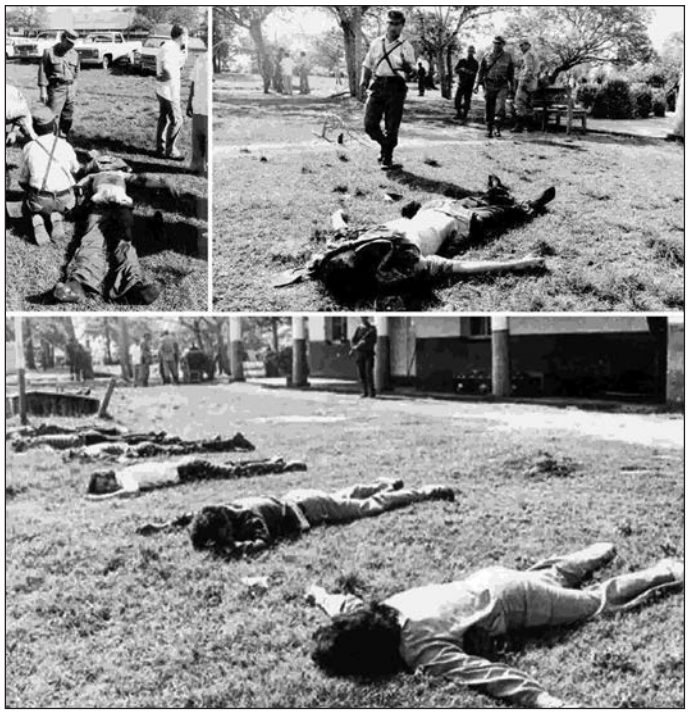
On 20 February, the armed forces proceeded to patrol the sector using UH-1H and Hughes 500 helicopters, and on the 21st there were several further clashes in which three more guerrillas were killed. Combat also took place on 22 February, in which six insurgents were killed, including Héctor Raúl Penayo, known as *Teniente Marcos*. With the guerrillas losing their leaders, they were now showing a vulnerability never before seen.

Commandos in Action

In mid-1975, the Army finished off the commando training course for that year. The instructor officer, Major Mohamed Alí Seineldín, requested that the high command allow the last stage of training to be carried out in the area of operations in the province of Tucumán. Once authorisation was granted, Commando Company 601 was



Plan of the 29th Mountain Infantry Regiment (RIM 29) base in Formosa. (Map by Author)



The aftermath: members of the 29th Mountain Infantry Regiment inspect the corpses of the *Montoneros* guerrillas killed during combat. (Open Source)

established. The commandos had a company chief, staff officers, a support group and three assault sections, totalling 50 troops.

Equipped with camouflage uniforms, black boots, a green beret and sophisticated weapons and equipment – consisting of NATO 7.62mm FAL rifles, MAG machine guns, rocket launchers, grenades, state-of-the-art communications and commando daggers – their motto was 'God and Homeland, or Death'. The commando troops moved to El Palomar AB, where they boarded an FAA C-130 Hercules in which they left for the theatre of operations. Once in Tucumán, the commandos were deployed to the forests in UH-1H helicopters.

The terrain in which they were preparing to operate was not completely unknown to them, since part of their training had taken place in the jungles of Misiones and in the Paraná Delta, with long journeys through the jungle, assault operations, ambushes and diving tests in which they put their physical integrity and body resistance to the test.

Commando Company 601 arrived in Tucumán wearing olive green uniforms and rank insignia, like the regular troops that had been fighting since 1974, because the airport was under permanent surveillance by the ERP and its allies and it was feared that they could be detected. Once on the ground their commander, Major Seineldín, appeared before General Vilas to coordinate their actions and implement a change in tactics consisting of patrols through the forest, from the mountains to the populated centres, the inverse of what had been practiced since the beginning of the war. To do so, a rectangle was drawn on the map that encompassed the area of operations, from National Route 9 to the Aconquija mountains.

The first mission of the commandos began the day after their arrival, when the company, made up of their commander, his staff, the support group and three assault sections, boarded 10 UH-1Hs and departed on a night flight to the conflict area.

The helicopters headed south, then turned west into the surrounding hills and landed, at night, in the indicated area, immediately entering the thicket. The UH-1Hs descended to within a few centimetres of the ground and the commandos jumped out to disperse throughout the sector, very close to the dry bed of a stream.

Regrouping at a point established during mission planning, the commando troops entered the jungle, searching for enemy camps, while the helicopters dispersed. If they got into combat and it became intense, they were to request artillery support from Oto Melara 105mm cannons, which were waiting ready near Famaillá.

Their mission lasted three days, after which the commandos were to be resupplied by helicopter, remaining another three days in the area. However, Major Seineldín met his section chiefs and informed them that, in order not to betray their presence, the food delivery would be suspended, but not their mission, since it was practically certain that the passage of helicopters would alert the ERP of their presence. The rationing of food was arranged in the commando group, so as to consume it in moderation throughout the following 10 days and avoid the need for replenishment.

In that first mission, the elite troops discovered several camps where they seized weapons, documentation and clothing. Thirteen days later, they returned to Famaillá, satisfied that their duty had been accomplished, although somewhat disappointed at not having come into contact with the enemy. It had been a strenuous march, in which each member of the company lost 8–10kg in body weight.

The commandos' baptism of fire eventually took place in October, west of Famaillá, during their second patrol mission. In a series of brief but intense confrontations, they managed to kill numerous guerrillas and capture several more camps. Meanwhile, in Campo de Mayo, north of Buenos Aires, other sections of Aviation Battalion 601 were completing their training and preparing to march to relieve their comrades. The new section, made up of 30 troops, finished their intensive training period, at the end of which the initial replacement was arranged for December, the first of a series that lasted until the end of the war.

The Army Aviation

The Army Aviation entered into action at the beginning of the conflict, when UH-1H helicopters began reconnaissance flights in support of the troops of Colonel Mario Benjamín Menéndez in August 1974.

On 7 February 1975, the high command of the Argentine armed forces ordered the constitution of the Condor Combat Team, made up of a dozen UH-1H helicopters that constituted the 1st Section, two L-21B Super Cub reconnaissance planes belonging to Airmobile Battalion 601 and maintenance personnel from Aircraft Supply and Maintenance Company 601, SA.315B Lamas and a Fairchild Hiller FH-1100 helicopter from the National Gendarmerie that also transferred troops to the theatre of operations.

The Army Aviation flew a total of 3,500 hours in *Operativo Independencia*, during which it lost three aircraft, including the DHC-6 Twin Otter serial AE-259, from the Aviation Section of III Army Corps, and L-21B serial AE-008. As already mentioned, on 5 May 1976, the UH-1H helicopter serial AE-411 crashed near the Caspichango River. Another UH-1H, serial AE-412, sustained damage from enemy fire but landed successfully and was later recovered and repaired.

The Argentine Navy in *Operativo Independencia*

The war in Tucumán involved the participation of all three of Argentina's armed forces, in addition to the Gendarmerie and the Federal and Provincial Police. Given the magnitude of the conflict, the ARA ordered the dispatch of officers under the command of a captain, in order to provide support to the Army in logistics and intelligence tasks. In addition, a B80 Queen Air was dispatched to the theatre of operations for reconnaissance missions through thermal imaging as

Members of the Police and the Army killed during the *Montoneros* attack in Formosa. (Open Source)

previously described. An HU-16B Albatross was also used for search and rescue missions, and an Alouette III helicopter armed with 70mm rocket launchers saw action in Tucumán.

The FAA in Action

The participation of the FAA was much greater than that of Army Aviation, as from the beginning of the war it was in charge of controlling *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in Tucumán and the transport of troops and heavy weapons. F-27 Friendship/Troopship, SE-210 Caravelle and C-130 Hercules aircraft of I Air Brigade were used heavily during *Operativo Independencia*, to the extent that by the end of 1975 they had accumulated nearly 2,000 flying hours in these tasks. As already described, one of the C-130E Hercules, serial TC-62, was destroyed at the airport in Tucumán.

In October 1975, the armed forces high command ordered the dispatch of air combat units in support of ground troops. The locally built IA-58 Pucará attack aircraft carried out numerous attacks on enemy camps, columns and positions. This constituted its baptism of fire. At the end of that month, the FAA increased its participation by becoming involved in offensive reconnaissance operations and attacks in the forests in Tucumán. Having detected an extremist stronghold nestled in the jungle, the Army determined that a ground assault would be too risky and requested that the FAA attack it from the air.

The first combat mission of the FAA in the Tucumán war took place when four T-34A Mentor armed trainers departed from *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport to carry out a photographic survey and corroborate the enemy's presence in the sector. Once the position was confirmed, the aircraft returned to their base, indicating that the enclave was in the centre of a large depression covered by vegetation and that access by land was extremely difficult.

At 10:00 a.m. on 8 November, four A-4B Skyhawk attack jets of V Air Brigade based in San Luis took off from Villa Reynolds bound for Tucumán. Once over the objective, the formation leader dropped a smoke bomb in order to mark the target and allow his three comrades who were flying behind, at low altitude (300–500 metres), to drop fragmentation bombs and fire their 20mm guns intermittently. With the mission accomplished, the fighters turned west and returned to their base, leaving behind the burning enemy camp.

From that moment on, the A-4B Skyhawks carried out up to two daily raids, destroying numerous positions and attacking insurgent columns that were moving along the Caspichango River, west of Famaillá. In general, these missions were carried out with the support of Army Aviation units, in particular UH-1H helicopters equipped with 70mm Albatros rockets and a door gunner with MAG machine guns, whose mission was to mark the targets with smoke grenades.

During a mission to bombard enemy positions, an A-4B flying over the target at low altitude received shrapnel impacts from one of its bombs, which caused minor damage that was assessed at Villa Reynolds shortly after landing. The A-4B Skyhawk and B45/T-34 Mentor, which also carried out attack and light bombing missions, were joined by several IA-58 Pucará aircraft. The Pucará Task Group, based at Reconquista AB, began operations in September 1974 under the command of Vice Commodore José María Ignes Rosset, who was in charge of personnel training. In September 1975, the air base received orders to ready its counterinsurgency units, serials A-501 and A-502, which had been delivered to the FAA in July and August of that year respectively. In October, the Pucará serial A-503 was delivered, and the three aircraft were deployed to the area of operations. Eventually, the third Pucará prototype, serial AX-03, was also deployed there. Besides their machine guns, they were armed with LAU-61 rocket launchers. These aircraft were flown by Vice Commodore José María Ignes Rosset, Captain Igarzábal and lieutenants José Vacarezza, Ricardo Grunert, Carlos Varela and Carlos Fillipi, who operated from the Military Aviation School of Córdoba, carrying out cover and defence flights over troops who were moving on land, completing reconnaissance missions, aerial photographic surveys and counterinsurgency attacks on subversive enclaves from 11–17 December 1975. The Pucarás were flown as high-low-high profiles over 1,100km and proved to be outstanding attack platforms for low-level flights over difficult terrain, in high temperatures, humidity and heavy rain. No aircraft was lost due to either enemy fire or technical problems. After these missions, all the Pucarás returned to their base in Reconquista.

GENERAL MONTES

"La única respuesta será con las armas"

(INFORMACIÓN EN LA PAGINA OCHO)

El avión

(INFORMACIÓN PAG. VEINTICINCO)

Cerca de Rafaela, el terreno blando y la lluvia caída ayer dificultan la recuperación del Boeing de Aerolíneas que quedara allí el domingo, después de su secuestro por extremistas.

Ultimaron en Tucumán a quince extremistas

(INFORMACIÓN EN LA PAGINA TRECE)

The cover of the *Clarín* newspaper of Buenos Aires showed the 737 of *Aerolíneas Argentinas* on the rural landing strip and how the landing gear had sunk into the ground. (*Diario Clarín*)

The *Aerolíneas Argentinas* 737 on the rural runway of a farm near the town of Angélica in the province of Santa Fe, where it was forced to land by the hijackers (left). The Boeing was later able to take-off again after the FAA set up a temporary metal runway. (Open Source)

Army soldiers patrolling a provincial road in Acheral, Tucumán, in 1975. (*Ejército Argentino*)

An Army UH-1H near Acheral, after the combat at Arroyo San Gabriel where two NCOs, three conscripts and nine ERP guerrillas were killed. (*Ejército Argentino*)

The arrival of the new year marked a considerable decrease in the actions of the guerrillas, which led the Air Force high command to suspend daily flights and start an alert system consisting of 30 rotating guards, with II, IV, V and VIII Air Brigade aircraft, armed and ready to take-off towards the theatre of operations if necessary.

The FAA had six members killed in combat: Captain Roberto C. Aguilera, 1st Lieutenant Carlos E. Correa, sub lieutenants Gustavo P. López and César G. Ledesma, Assistant Sergeant Aldo R. Linares and 1st Corporal José A. Ramírez. It also had three personnel wounded: Sergeant Ramón J. Gil and Class 55 soldiers Carlos A. Romitti and Rubén N. Piazza.

Last Phase of the War

The Army carried out *Operación Lamadrid I* between 29 December 1975 and 18 January 1976, followed by phase II (19–25 January) and phase III (from 27 January to 25 February), with extensive searches of the forests and rivers to track down subversive elements and their camps. There were almost no confrontations, but it was possible to locate and destroy numerous guerrilla camps, seizing documentation, food and clothing, depriving the insurgents of vital supplies.

On 23 February, paratroopers from the 14th Airborne Infantry Regiment fought against a combined force of 65 ERP and *Montoneros* guerrillas in Tucumán. The airborne troops suffered two casualties, while the rebels lost at least a dozen fighters.

On 15 March, a violent terrorist attack almost cost Lieutenant General Videla his life when insurgents detonated a car bomb loaded with shrapnel, parked in one of the access streets to the Army General Command. The military chief was unharmed, but four colonels received serious injuries, as well as eight NCOs, five soldiers and six civilians who were passing by. Truck driver Alberto Blas García, who at the time was travelling on Madero Avenue, lost his life when he was hit by numerous pieces of shrapnel. The war in Tucumán, meanwhile, continued.

Soon after, on 24 March, a *coup d'état* overthrew the constitutional government of Isabel Perón (see the following chapter for details) and brought to power a military junta made up of Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera and Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti.

On 2 April, another confrontation took place close to the Caspichango River, in which four insurgents were killed. The final intervention in combat of the Army Aviation Hueys was on 5 May 1976, when troops led by Captain José A. Ramallo, who was seeking rebel forces in the Santa Mónica area, requested the presence of a helicopter gunship to carry out an aerial reconnaissance. That day, the command of V Infantry Brigade received information that a group of guerrillas was raiding in this zone in order to get food supplies, so an order was dispatched to locate and attack them. Troops got on the Huey serial AE-411 and headed towards the Zavalía sector. The UH-1H patrolled the area for hours, but suddenly stopped transmitting at 10:00 p.m. After an intensive search, the wrecked UH-1H was found on the banks of the Caspichango River, about 4km north of Santa Lucía, the following morning. It was thought that the Huey struck foliage in the forest while it was chasing guerrillas executing fire support, then crashed. The pilot, Sub Lieutenant César Gonzalo Ledesma, Captain José Ramallo, Sergeant Walter H. Gómez and 1st Corporal Carlos Parra were killed in the accident. Sergeant Ramón Julián Gil and Class 55 soldiers Carlos Alberto Romitti and Rubén Nelson Piazza were wounded.

On 8 May, an attack on an Army ambulance in Caspichango claimed the lives of medical Sub Lieutenant Juan A. Toledo Pimentel, Paramedic Sergeant Alberto Eduardo Lai and soldier Carlos Alberto Cajal. Eighteen days later, the guerrilla known as *Paula*, who was suspected of firing the shot that killed Sub Lieutenant Hernán Berdina in Potrero Negro in September 1975, was shot dead in Yacuchina.

Despite fighting on, the *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company was in a state of crisis, with its numbers seriously diminished, almost unarmed and without supplies. It was at this moment when, disjointed and limited in their actions, elements of the Guevarista Youth expressed the intention to voluntarily join their ranks and avoid the formation's total collapse. The armed forces continued to pursue the company's fighters into the forests, the rebels limiting themselves to carrying out evasive manoeuvres, constantly avoiding combat, with the intention of maintaining their presence in the jungle as long as possible.

More *Montoneros* Actions in Buenos Aires

During June and July 1976, the *Montoneros* carried out several major operations. On 18 June, they assassinated the Chief of the Federal Police, Brigadier General Cesáreo Ángel Cardozo, using a 700-gram trotyl bomb placed under his bed at home by 18-year-old Ana María González, a *Montonera* guerrilla and friend of the general's daughter, Graciela Cardozo. The girls were classmates at the university and often studied together. The guerrilla took advantage of their friendship to place the bomb in her classmate's father's bedroom. González was later killed by an Army conscript at a transit checkpoint.

On the following day, a nighttime armed confrontation erupted between an operational column of ARA Marines and a cell of *Montoneros* led by Juan Miguel Gianfrancisco in an upper floor of an apartment building in the Belgrano neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. The terrorists, cornered in an apartment, threw a hand grenade at the ARA forces, the blast from which was heroically taken by Marine Infantry Frigate Lieutenant Jorge Omar Mayol, covering his comrades with his own body and being killed by the explosion. The head of the

UH-1H serial AE-412 of the Argentine Army, which was hit by fire from ERP guerrillas and had to make an emergency landing. The pilot and another officer were wounded and a door gunner was killed. (Dr Atilio Marino collection via Vladimiro Cettolo)

operation, Frigate Captain Salvio Olegario Menéndez, was seriously injured by the blast. During the confusion of the evacuation of the wounded, the terrorists escaped into the darkness.

On 2 July, a *Montonero* combatant infiltrated in the Federal Police, former police conscript José María Salgado, known as *Pepe*, placed a Vietnamese-type bomb containing nine kilos of TNT and five kilos of steel balls inside a briefcase in the dining room of the Federal Security Superintendence (also known as Federal Coordination) of the Federal Police in the city of Buenos Aires. The explosion caused the collapse of the roof of the dining room when it was full of Police NCOs having lunch. Twenty-three people were killed, including a visiting civilian, and some 60 people were injured. Those who lost their lives were Officer Inspector David Ron, Auxiliary NCO José Hilario Carrasco, Assistant NCOs Alejandro Castro and Héctor Castro, Sergeants Juan Paulik, Rafael Modesto Muñiz, Bernardo Roberto Tapia, María Esther Pérez Canto, Romualdo Rodríguez, Bernardo Roberto Zapi, Adolfo Chiarini and María Olga Pérez, 1st Corporal Carlos Shand, Corporals Ernesto Agustín Suani, Genaro Bartolomé Rodríguez, Vincent Iori and Elba Hilda Gazpio, Agents José Roberto Iacovello, Juan Carlos Blanco, Alicia Esther Lunati and Ernesto Alberto Martinzo, Supernumeraries David Ezequiel Di Nuncio and Ramón Arias and a civilian visitor, Josefina Melucci de Cepeda. The masterminds of the terrorist attack were *Montoneros* Chief of Intelligence Rodolfo Walsh, known as *Esteban*, and Marcelo Kurlat, known as *Monra*, who handed over the bomb personally to Salgado.

The Death of ERP Commander Santucho

On 19 July 1976, the ERP suffered a mortal blow. That day, Army troops under the command of Captain Juan Carlos Leonetti went to an apartment building located in Villa Martelli, a few metres from the Pan-American highway and General Paz Avenue, where Domingo Menna, a member of the political bureau of the PRT-ERP, lived. ERP commander Mario Roberto Santucho had left Tucumán and was planning a trip to Cuba. The raid took place when the group was trying to coordinate its operations with the *Montoneros*, an action aimed at promoting the merger of both forces in what would be called the *Organización para la Liberación de la Argentina* (Organisation for the Liberation of Argentina). At that time, Santucho and his partner, Liliana Delfino, were preparing to leave the country for Havana, Cuba, in order to save their lives.

That day, Army forces surrounded the building and entered cautiously, making their way to Menna's apartment. In the apartment, Santucho, Benito Urteaga, Fernando Gertel, Liliana Delfino, Ana María Lanciloto and the owner of the house were in conversation, failing to notice what was happening around them. Suddenly, Captain Leonetti shouted for the terrorists to surrender, but far from obeying the order, they took up their weapons and opened fire. Leonetti fell dead, his second-in-command taking over control of the assault. The government forces broke into the apartment and killed all its occupants, who offered strong resistance. Valuable information was also seized, including the names of 395 members of the Guevarist Youth and the ERP Support Commandos who were intending to act during the 1978 FIFA World Cup to be staged in Argentina. The *Montoneros* and the ERP told their own, hardly credible, version of events, claiming that all their comrades surrendered but were shot by Army troops.

In that operation, the ERP, along with its political arm, the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*, lost almost all of its leadership. Coming on top of the disastrous operation at Monte Chingolo and the defeats it experienced in Tucumán, it was clear that its days as a fighting force and major political organisation were numbered.

While the Army troops removed the bodies of the six subversives and the dead officer, news spread of the murder in Wilde of General Omar Carlos Actis, shot by the *Montoneros* while he was on his way to a conference. General Actis had been appointed by the government to lead the organisation of the FIFA World Cup to be held in Argentina in 1978. That same day, the *Montoneros* also killed the engineer Carlo Antonio Bergonetti, Vice Director of *Mater Fer* (Railway Materials) of FIAT in the city of Córdoba.

The *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company Slowly Fades Away

With its main commanders eliminated, the ERP, by then under the leadership of Enrique Gorriarán Merlo and Juan Arnold Kremer, was mortally wounded and began its slow withdrawal from the scene.

Subversive actions in the country remained in the hands of the *Montoneros* group, which from that moment carried out operations purely and exclusively in urban areas, including the assassination of executive Carlos A. Berconetti in Córdoba on 19 August 1976, the attempt to take over of the Ringuelet substation on 10 September and an attack the same day in Rosario against a Santa Fe police bus, in which a car bomb killed 11 officers and injured several more, including passers-by. The group also assassinated the manager of *Banco de la Nación Argentina*, Daniel A. Cash, on 17 September in Buenos Aires, and was involved in 14 other terrorist acts before the end of the year, including an attempt to detonate a bomb in the box occupied by General Videla and others senior military commanders during a ceremony in Campo de Mayo, an attack against the deputy chief of the Buenos Aires Province Police, Colonel Ernesto Trotz, who lost his left arm, and a terrible attack on 15 December in the conference room of the Undersecretary for Planning of the Ministry of Defence in the federal capital, which caused 14 deaths and seriously injured 20 others.

By 10 October, the armed forces could identify locations where the *Montoneros* gathered in several main cities of the country. In a two-day operation in several provinces, members of dozens of high and medium-level groups of *Montoneros* were either killed in combat or captured, although some of the latter committed suicide with cyanide pills. This disaster for the terrorist organisation signalled the beginning of its final defeat. Most of the high-ranking *Montoneros* leaders escaped abroad, leaving behind minor cadres, dispersed and abandoned to their fate. They would still carry out some brutal but

Brigadier General Acdel Vilas praying at the funeral of 1st Corporal José Anselmo Ramírez, door gunner of UH-1H AE-412, who fell in combat (left). The painful side of the anti-subversive war, with officers carrying the coffin of a comrade who was killed in action to his last resting place. (Ejército Argentino)

An Argentine Army soldier inspecting a captured ERP camp in the middle of the Tucumán jungle in 1975 (left). Two soldiers near the corpse of an ERP guerrilla in Acheral (right). (Ejército Argentino)

isolated attacks until 1979, the year when their criminal operations finally ceased.

The ERP, meanwhile, limited itself to minor actions, including the kidnapping of the industrialist Sid de la Paz on 10 September, the assassination of Commodore Adolfo Valis on 9 November and the killing of Colonel Francisco B. Castellano on 29 December.

In Tucumán, the guerrillas, reduced to a small number of combatants, were also in a critical position. On 27 May, the ERP Mountain Company seized and executed the peasant Marcelo Jiménez, in front of his family, in Caspichango, accused of being an Army informer. Shortly after, in another armed clash, six *Montoneros* reinforcements were killed trying to support the actions of the ERP. Then in October, the commander of the *Ramón Rosa Jiménez* Mountain Company, Captain Raúl MacDonald, and two other insurgents were killed near El Soloco, marking the end of operations in Tucumán. The next day, another six guerrillas from MacDonald's platoon fell in combat as they fled through the bush.

In total, the region witnessed 24 armed combats, with 68 camps destroyed, 74 guerrillas killed and 18 regular troops losing their lives. Many civilians were also killed. The operations there ended with the complete military triumph of the armed forces.

Decorations Awarded to Army Air Units and Crews

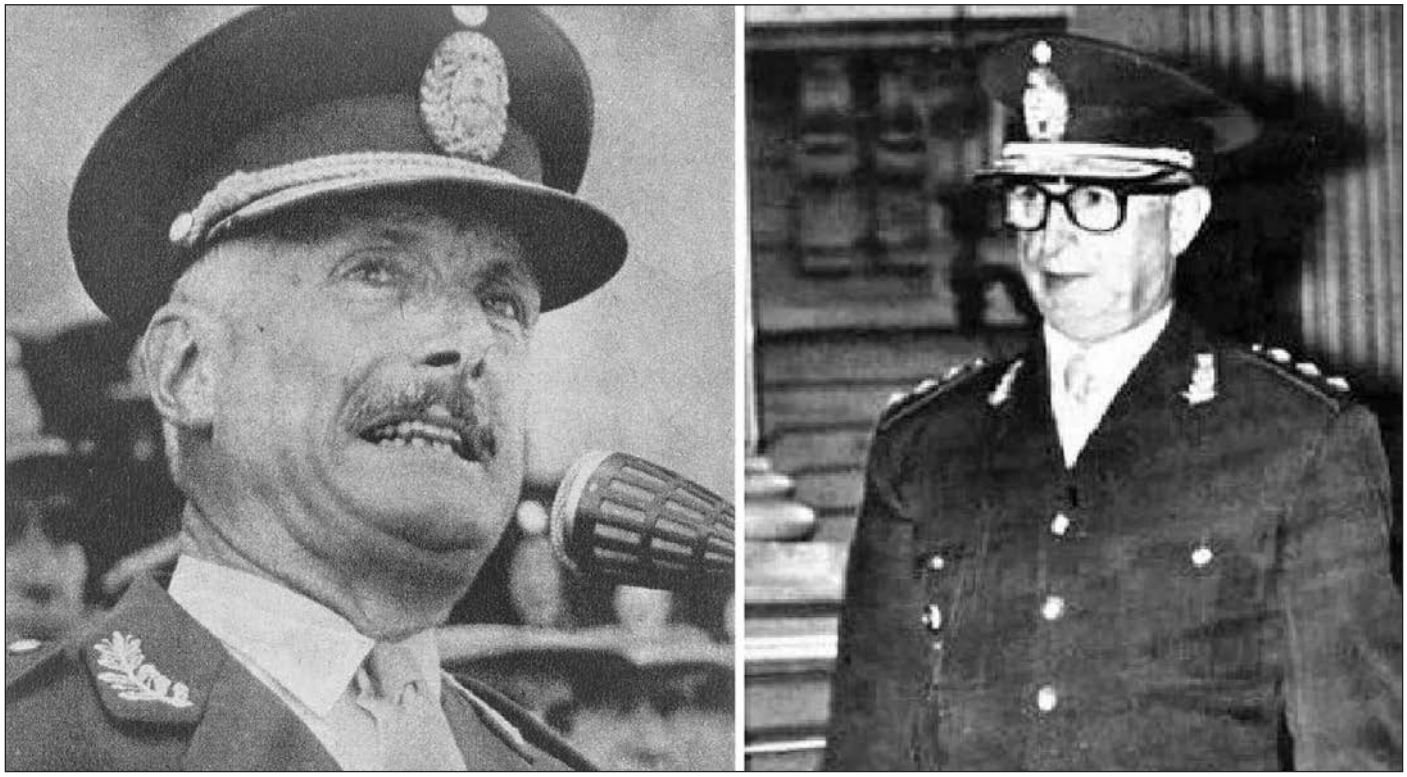
Closing the campaign in 1977, decorations were awarded, among others, to the following air units and crews of the campaign:

- The Campaign Medal was awarded to the Assault Helicopter Company, Combat Aviation Battalion 601.
- The Heroically Killed in Combat Medal was given to Captain Roberto C. Aguilera, 1st Lieutenant Carlos E. Correa and Sergeant Aldo R. Linares, crew members of the DHC-6 serial AE-259; Sub Lieutenant Gustavo P. López, pilot of the L-21 serial AE-008; 1st Corporal José A. Ramírez, gunner of the UH-1H serial AE-412; and Sub Lieutenant César G. Ledesma, pilot of the UH-1H serial AE-411.
- The Wounded in Combat Medal was awarded to Sergeant Ramón J. Gil and Class 55 soldiers Carlos A. Romitti and Rubén N. Piazza.
- The Heroic Courage in Combat Medal was given to 1st Lieutenant Honorio E. Luzuriaga.

Table 2: Military and Police deceased in Tucumán[8]

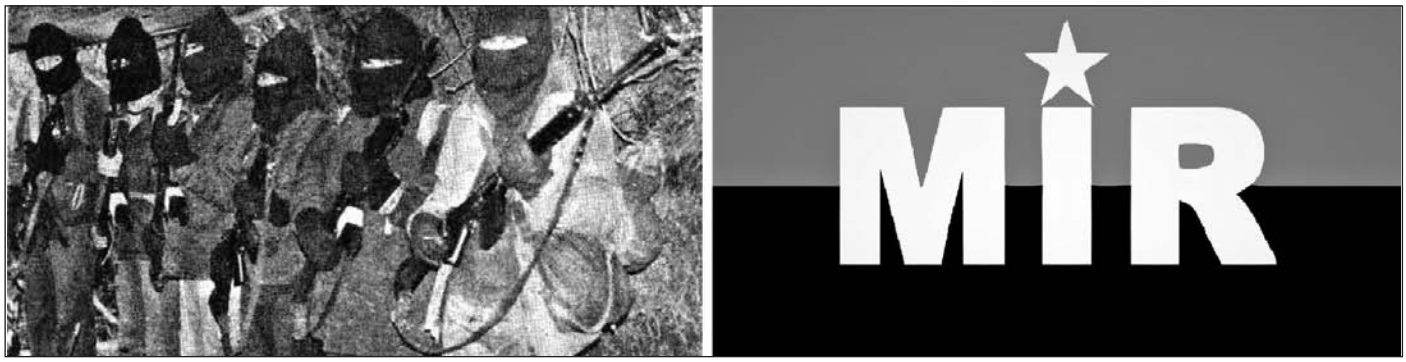
Army & Police Ranks	Fatal Casualties
Major Generals	1
Brigadier Generals	1
Colonels	1
Lieutenant Colonels	3
Majors	4
Captains	3
1st Lieutenants	3
Lieutenants	2
Sub Lieutenants	5
Sergeants	5
Corporals	5
Soldiers	12
Policemen	9
Gendarmes	6
Cause	**Number of victims**
Air crashes	21
ERP terrorist attacks	14
Killed in combat	25
TOTAL	60

Army troops in the captured ERP El Niño Perdido camp in the jungle of Tucumán. (Open Source)



Lieutenant Generals (Ret.) Alcides López Aufranc (left) and Benjamín Rattenbach (right) acidly criticised the government of Isabel Perón in October 1975. (Open Source)

Sub Lieutenant Diego Barceló, who was killed in combat in the La Fronterita area (left). An Army Unimog truck at La Fronterita sugar mill in Tucumán (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)



Chilean MIR guerrillas (left). The MIR emblem (right). (Open Source)

Emblems of the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA) of Chile (left) and the State Intelligence Secretariat (SIDE) of Argentina (right), which cooperated in the exchange of intelligence information on subversive groups in both countries. (Open Source)

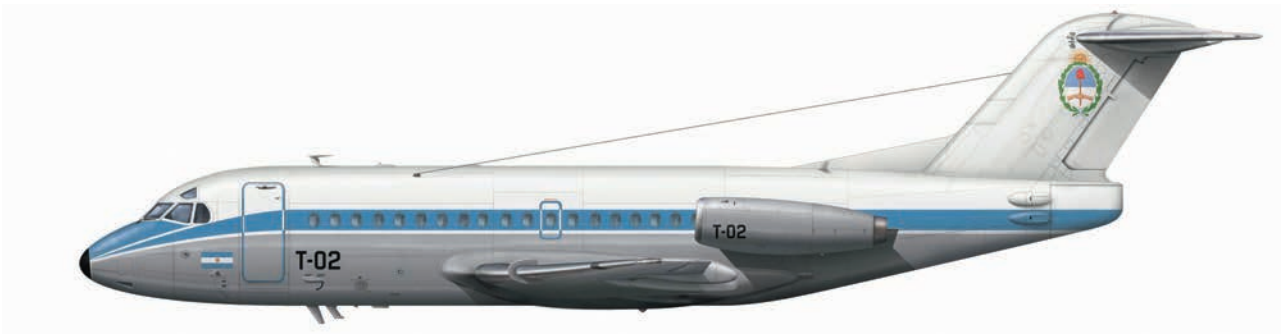
Retired Major General Jorge Esteban Cáceres Monié (left) and his wife, Beatriz Isabel Sasiain (right), were brutally murdered by the *Montoneros*. (Open Source)

Protagonists of Operation Blue Condor: Brigadier Major Jesús Orlando Cappellini (left), Brigadier General Héctor Fautario (centre), Brigadier Major José María Klix (right) and Brigadier Major Rolando Ramón Agosti (below). The mediator of the crisis was Monsignor Tórtolo, the vicar of the armed forces (right). (Open Source)

An Aerocommander AC500 of the FAA. (Horacio Gareiso)

An FAA B45 (T-34A) Mentor in tactical camouflage. (Horacio Gareiso)

The flag carrier of Argentina was founded in 1949 by a decree of President Juan Domingo Perón, as a state-owned union of four airlines, and Ezeiza International Airport was constructed outside Buenos Aires. Through the 1950s, it earned itself a reputation as the best commercial airline in the world, for its efficient organisation and the quality of its services. Starting from 1970, it acquired 12 Boeing 737-200s. On 5 October 1975, under the name *Operación Primicia* (Operation Novelty), one of these – registration LV-JNE, named *Ciudad de Trelew* – was hijacked by a *Montoneros* group while underway with 102 passengers and six crew on board, and diverted to Formosa International. The latter had been captured by gunmen who took 200 hostages and then assaulted the base of the 29th Infantry Regiment. The surviving militants then escaped aboard the Boeing, and a Cessna 182, to the countryside near Rafaela, Santa Fe province. (Artwork by Rolando Ugolini)



In the early 1970s, the Argentine government and the FAA followed several other local airlines (including *Aerolinas Argentinas*, LADE, American Falcon, *Dinar Lineas Aéreas* and LAER), and began purchasing the Fokker F.28 Mk. 1000 Fellowship, twin-engined, short-range jet airliner. Amongst these was the aircraft registered as T-02 (later T-04, and then T-50 when transferred to the FAA, in 2005), and named *Patagonia*. Serving as the personal transport for several presidents (even the Pope during his visit to the country), at the time this wore the crest of the President of the Republic of Argentina on the fin, as shown here. During *Operación Gaviota* (Operation Seagull), on 18 February 1977, the ERP attempted to destroy it while it was carrying President Videla and other high officials. The main bomb failed to detonate, while the blast of the other did not prevent the jet from taking off undamaged. (Artwork by Rolando Ugolini)

Sikorsky S-58T serial number H-02 was one of two helicopters of the FAA (the other was H-01), destined to serve the presidency of the republic. As such, it was frequently used to carry President Isabel Perón between the Olivos Presidential Residence and the Casa Rosada, and back. It was during one of these trips, early in the morning of 24 March 1976, that its crew landed at Jorge Newbery Metropolitan Airport, where the President was arrested, and the *coup d'état* took place. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

A year after being reestablished in 1956, the Argentine Army Aviation acquired eight Piper L-21B for use as elementary trainers, for liaison and aerial observation. Through the following decade, the service underwent a major expansion and acquired well over 100 Agusta A.109, Aérospatiale SA.330 Puma, and Bell 205/UH-1H Huey helicopters, Boeing-Vertol CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters, and Cessna U-17 liaison aircraft. While involved in *Operativo Independencia* (Operation Independence), this L-21B, serial AE-008, crashed on the eastern slope of the Aconquija mountains, due to marginal weather conditions. The crew of two was killed. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

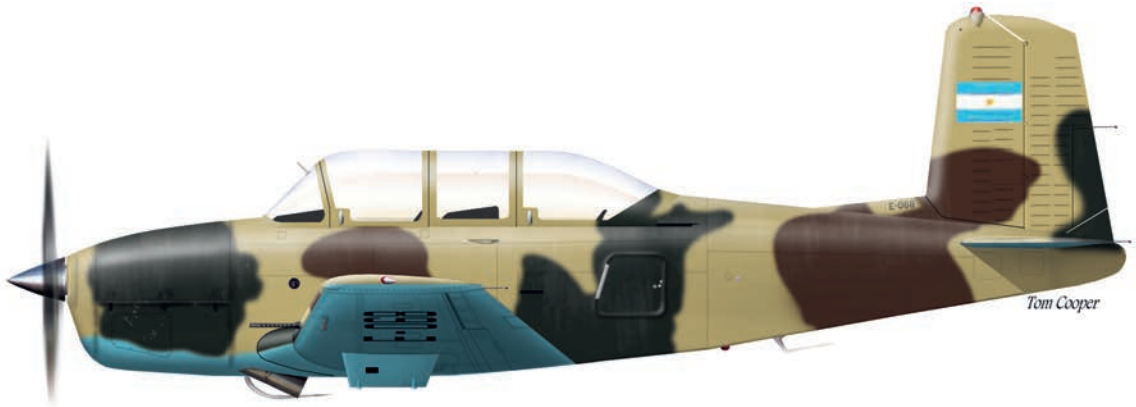
When its plan for the purchase of Aeriatalia G.222 transports caused friction with the FAA, the Argentine Army Aviation opted for de Havilland Canada DHC-6-200 Twin Otter utility transports. These soon proved their efficiency during operations in Antarctica. On 5 January 1975, this Twin Otter (serial AE-259) struck Nuñorco Chico hill, at an altitude of 2,000 metres, while underway on a reconnaissance mission over the Tafí del Valle area, in Tucumán. All three crew members and 10 senior officers on board were killed. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)

The most numerous type operated by the Argentine Army Aviation as of the mid-1970s was the Bell UH-1 Huey, with a total of 26 UH-1D/Hs in service. All were left in their original livery, consisting of US Army Forest Green overall, and wore service titles (EJERCITO) in black or white on the boom. Serials starting with AE-401 upwards were usually applied in black on the nose, and above the fin flash. UH-1Hs were heavily utilised in most of the operations against the ERP in Tucumán, both in 1975 and 1976, mostly to carry troops involved in counterinsurgency operations, and armed with two pintle-mounted M60 machine guns, on either side of the cabin, as shown on the UH-1D here. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)

Bell UH-1s of the Argentine Army Aviation, as shown in this illustration of a UH-1H, were usually deployed for transporting troops or supplies, and for several heliborne assaults. Additionally, they saw deployment as attack helicopters, armed with SNORA launchers for 81mm unguided rockets. On 5 May 1976, while chasing a group of guerrillas, this helicopter (serial AE-411) hit the top of several threes and crashed. The pilot, Sub Lieutenant César Gonzalo Ledesma, Captain José Ramallo, Sergeant Walter H. Gómez, and 1st Corporal Carlos Parra were killed. Sergeant Ramón Julián Gil and soldiers Carlos Alberto Romitti and Rubén Nelson Piazza, were injured. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)

FAC or radio relay during COIN operations was usually provided by Hughes 369HM helicopters of the FAA. This example (serial H-36) is shown as it appeared while operated by the 2nd Helicopter Squadron, 7th Air Group, VII Air Brigade of the FAA, home-based at Morón AB. Hughes 369s could also be armed, either with 7.62mm machine guns or with pods for 68mm unguided rockets. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)

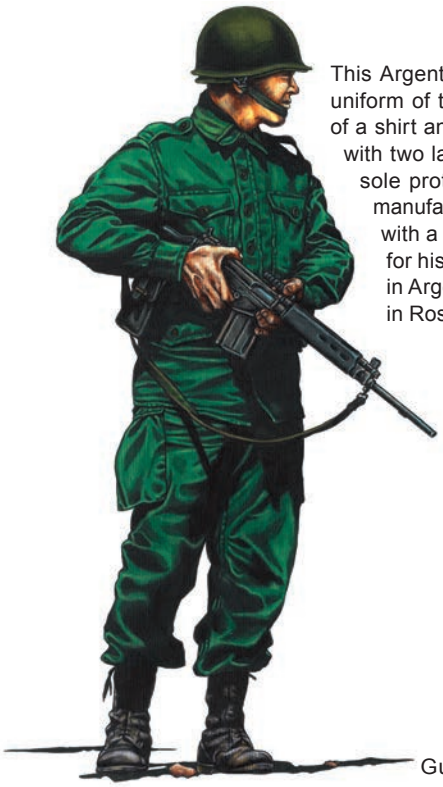
Argentine naval aviation (COAN) also became involved in operations against the ERP in the Tucumán jungle. Perhaps its most important asset for such purposes were five Beechcraft B80 Queen Air liaison aircraft that served in the transport role and also for photoreconnaissance. The example illustrated here (serial 0679/4-F-21) was one of two modified through the installation of an Omega navigation system and infrared sensors used to detect ERP camps in the jungle. Both were notable for having a disruptive camouflage pattern in either BS381C/361 Light Stone or BS381C/388 Beige and BS381C/283 Grey-Green, instead of their usual livery in white and light grey. Undersides appear to have been painted in BS381C/627 Light Aircraft Grey. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Although primarily acquired and deployed for elementary flight training at the Military Aviation School in Córdoba, a number of Beechcraft B45/T-34 Mentors were deployed in a counterinsurgency role. They had a single 7.62mm machine gun installed into each wing, as well as underwing hardpoints for carriage of light bombs and up to four unguided rockets. All had different disruptive camouflage colours usually consisting of green or brown, or – as in this case, showing the aircraft with serial number E-068 – in light stone or beige, dark brown and dark green. The serial was applied in very small characters at the base of the fin: whether it was repeated under the left wing, as shown here, remains unclear. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

By 1975, the FAA had a total of 98 FMA IA.58 Pucará fighter-bombers, custom tailored for COIN operations, of which just 17 were in service. All were assigned to the 3rd Attack Group, III Air Brigade, home-based at BAM Reconquista. Subsequently, the 4th Attack Squadron of the IX Air Brigade, home-based at BAM Comodoro Rivadavia was also equipped with the type. Their internal armament consisted of four 7.62mm Browning machine guns and two Hispano Suiza 20mm HS-804 automatic guns. Pucarás had two hardpoints under each wing and one under the centreline, and could carry up to 1,500kg of bombs or unguided rockets; the type saw intensive deployment during *Operativo Independencia*. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)

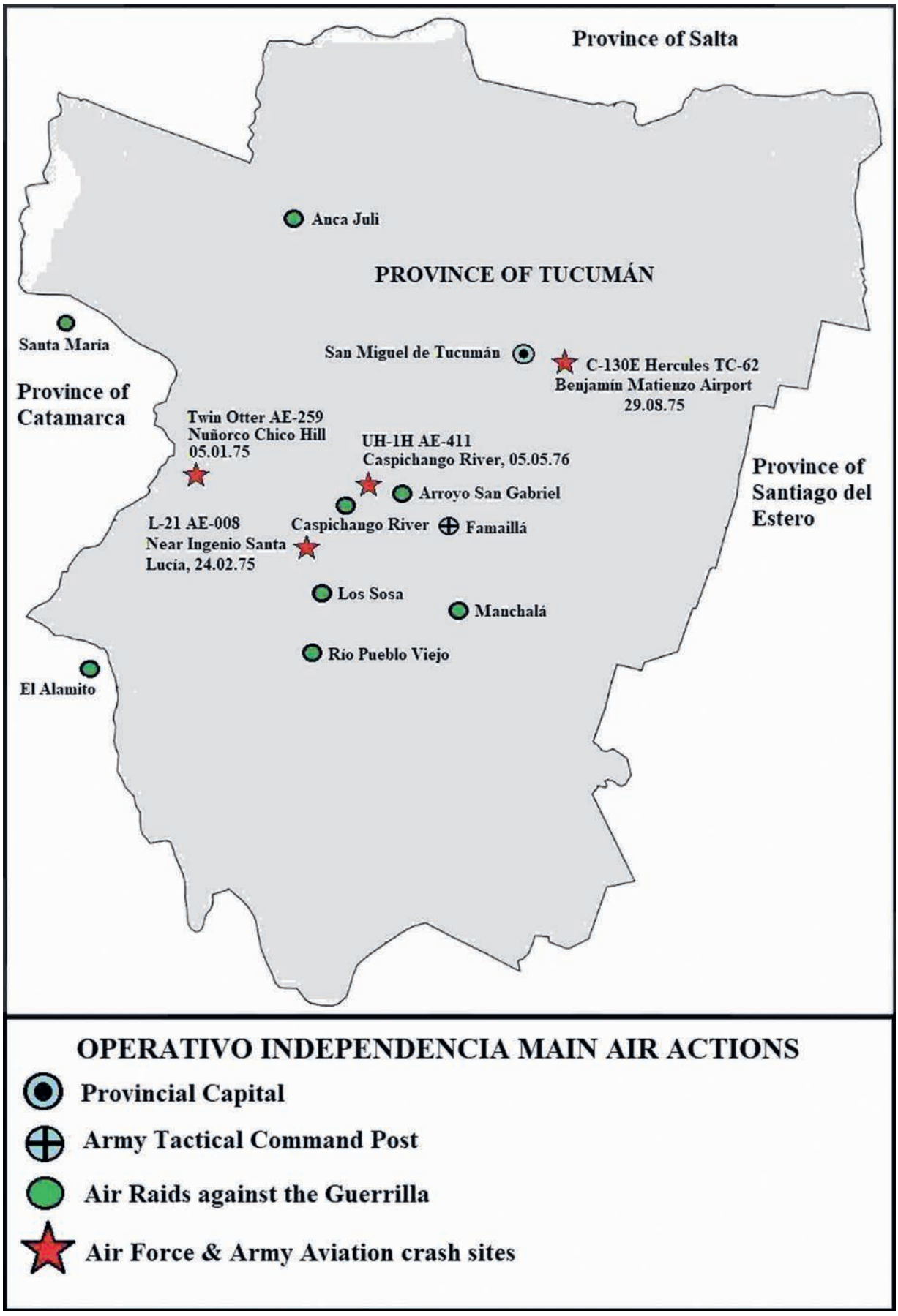
While wearing silver-grey overall livery when originally acquired from surplus stocks of the US Navy, in the early 1970s all the Douglas A-4B Skyhawks of the FAA received a camouflage pattern in dark brown and dark green. All were assigned to the 5th Fighter Group of V Air Brigade, home-based at Coronel Pringles, outside Villa Reynolds. Their internal armament included two Colt 20mm Mk. 12 autocannons and they had three underwing pylons with a total capacity of up to 2,000kg of bombs or pods for unguided rockets. Like the Pucarás, Skyhawks saw intensive involvement in *Operativo Independencia*. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



This Argentine Army conscript is shown wearing the standard uniform of the mid-1970s. Of traditional design, this consisted of a shirt and long jacket with four pockets, reinforced trousers with two large side pockets, and traditional leather boots. His sole protection was the M1 steel helmet of US design but manufactured locally. His other gear is limited to a leather belt with a large metal buckle, and two pouches for magazines for his firearm: an FAL 7.62mm assault rifle, manufactured in Argentina by Fábrica Militar de Armas Domingo Matheu, in Rosario. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

Guerrillas of the PRT-ERP in Tucumán province generally wore working trousers and shirts made by the Argentine company GRAFA, popular in the mid-1970s. This individual added a Mao-style cap, with an old Boca Juniors t-shirt, and a belt likely taken from military stockpiles. His holster was probably from the Federal Police, either for a revolver or pistol made by ITALO or BESA. His primary firearm was a FAL assault rifle. Insets show traditional *alpargatas* (canvas shoes) with rubber soles, regularly worn by the guerrillas when operating in forests, and the flag of the PRT-ERP. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

This commando of the Argentine Army is shown as of the mid-1970s, while attached to the Infantry School in Campo de Mayo, in Buenos Aires. His rank of lieutenant (and officer) is identified by the insignia attached to the button of his left chest pocket on the same uniform as used by the 4th Airborne Infantry Brigade. His head is covered by a black beret with a metal badge of the Commandos. He also has a canvas belt of US origin, and an officer's sword, while the leather holster for his Browning 9mm pistol is carried by a strap across his left shoulder 'Sam Browne' style. The inset shows the metal badge of the Argentine Commandos, officially adopted in 1971. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)



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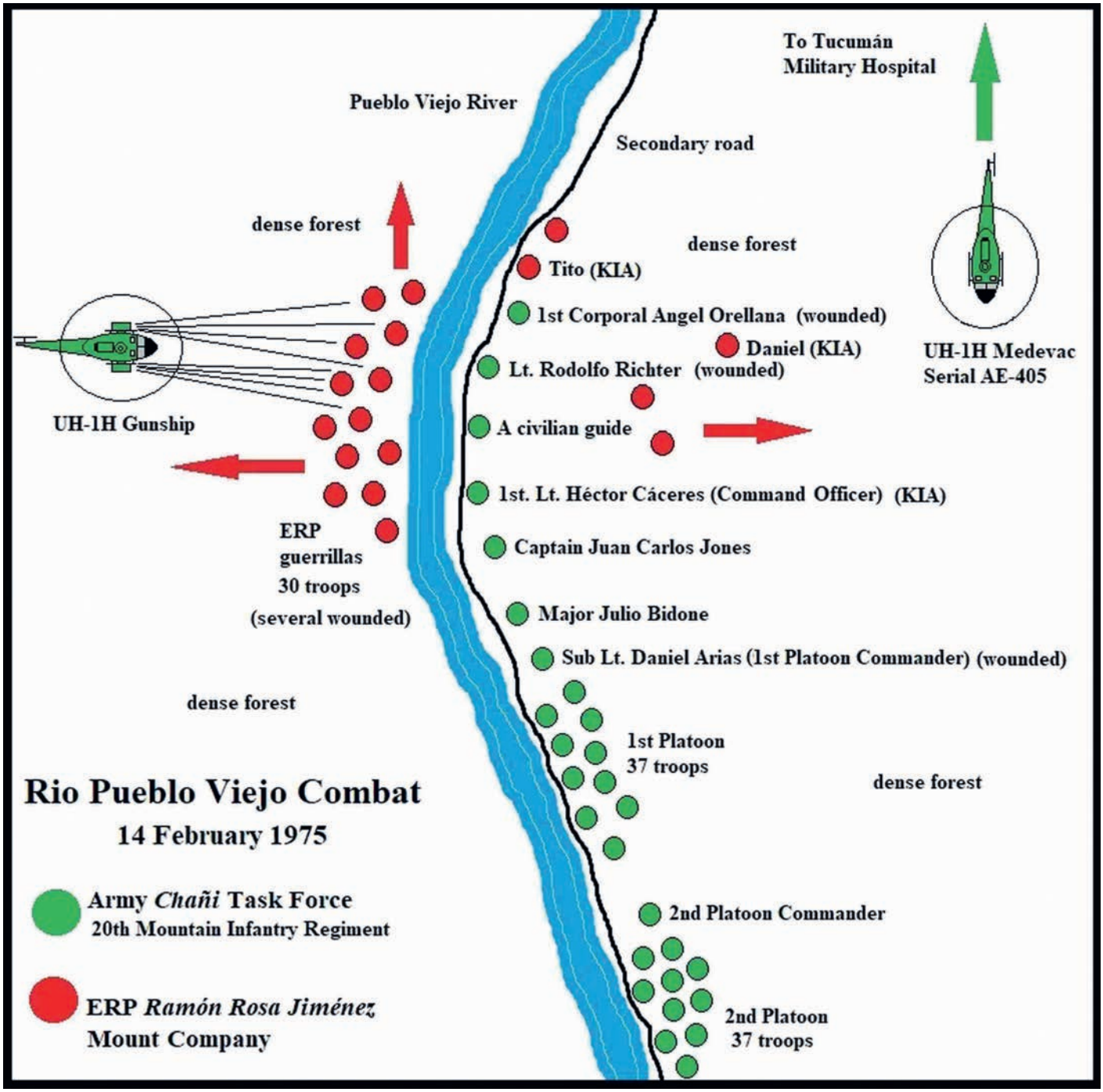

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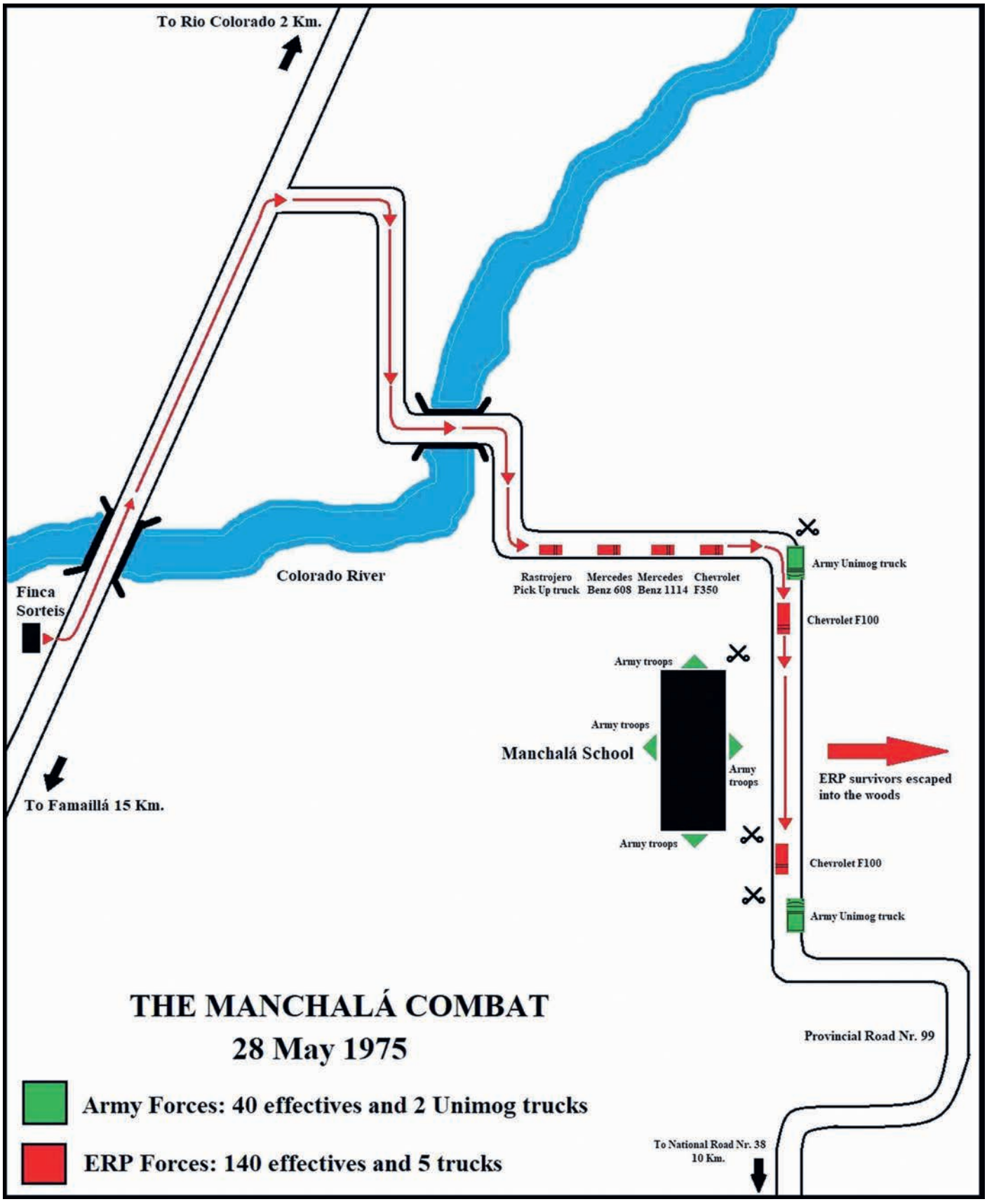


(map by author)

PRONUNCIAMIENTO EN LA FUERZA AEREA CONTRA EL GOBIERNO NACIONAL

Edición de 72 páginas, para Capital y Gran Buenos Aires
Precio de este ejemplar $ 15.—

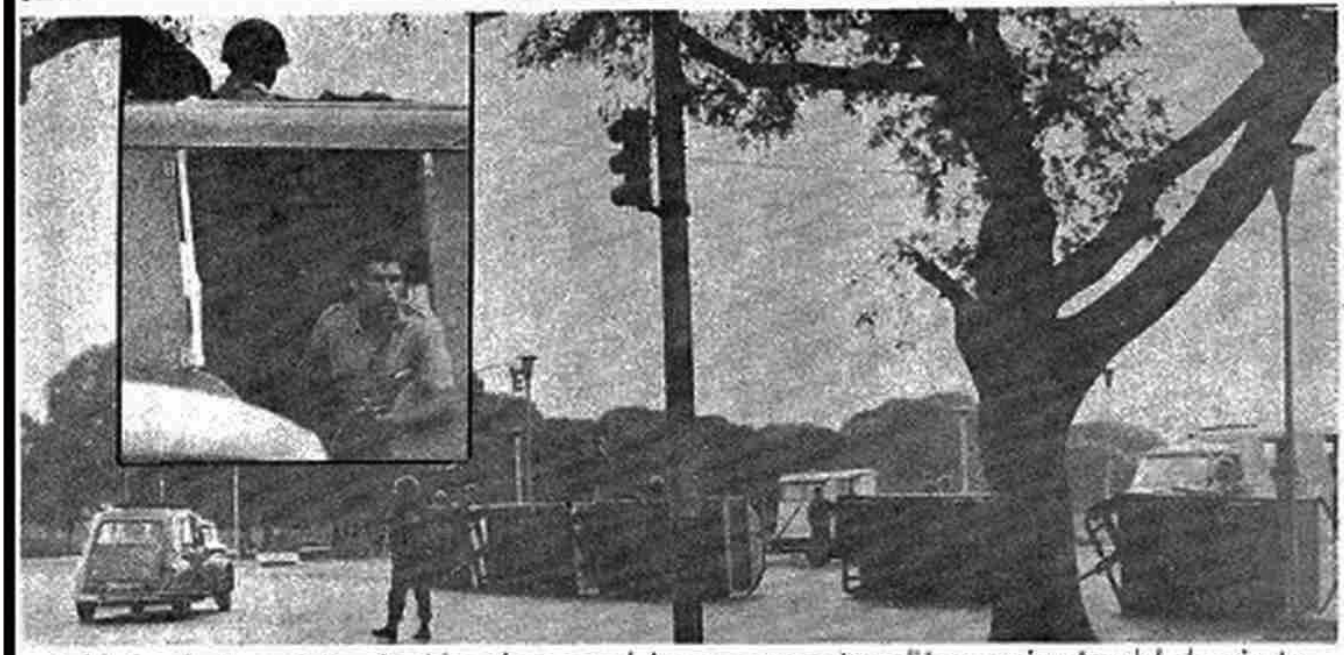
Clarín

Viernes 19 de Diciembre de 1975

Año XXXI

RELEVARON A FAUTARIO

Afirmó Robledo que la crisis está superada



Soldados de Aeronáutica impiden el acceso al Aeroparque metropolitano, epicentro del alzamiento.

ESTA MADRUGADA

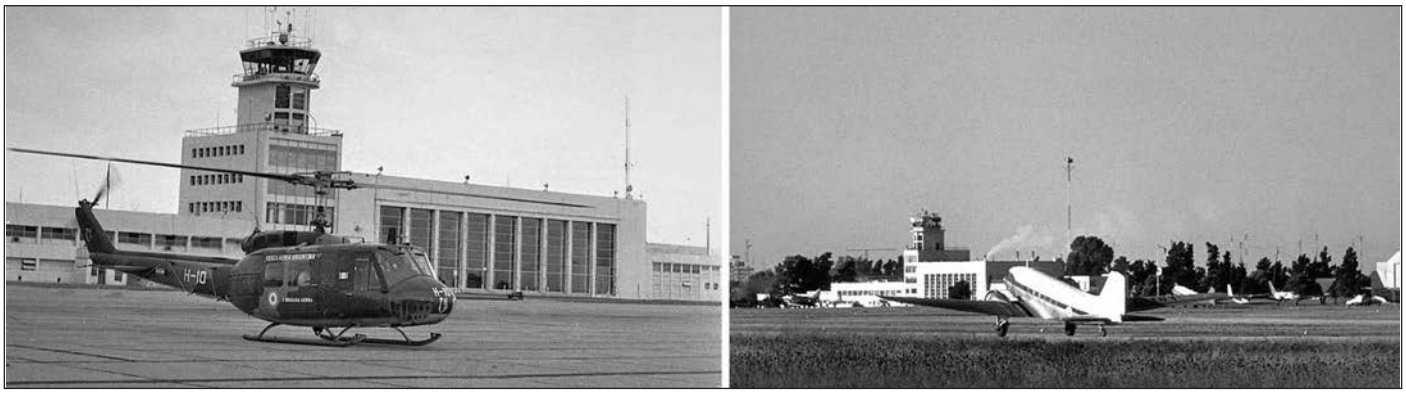
VIDELA SE REUNIO CON ALTOS JEFES MILITARES

Cover of the *Clarín* newspaper of Buenos Aires on Friday, 19 December 1975, announcing the uprising in the FAA. (*Diario Clarín*)

A pair of Dassault Mirage IIIEAs of the FAA. (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

Types of aircraft used to counter Brigadier Cappellini's uprising: BAC Canberra (top left), A-4B Skyhawk (top right) and IA.58 Pucará (bottom). (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

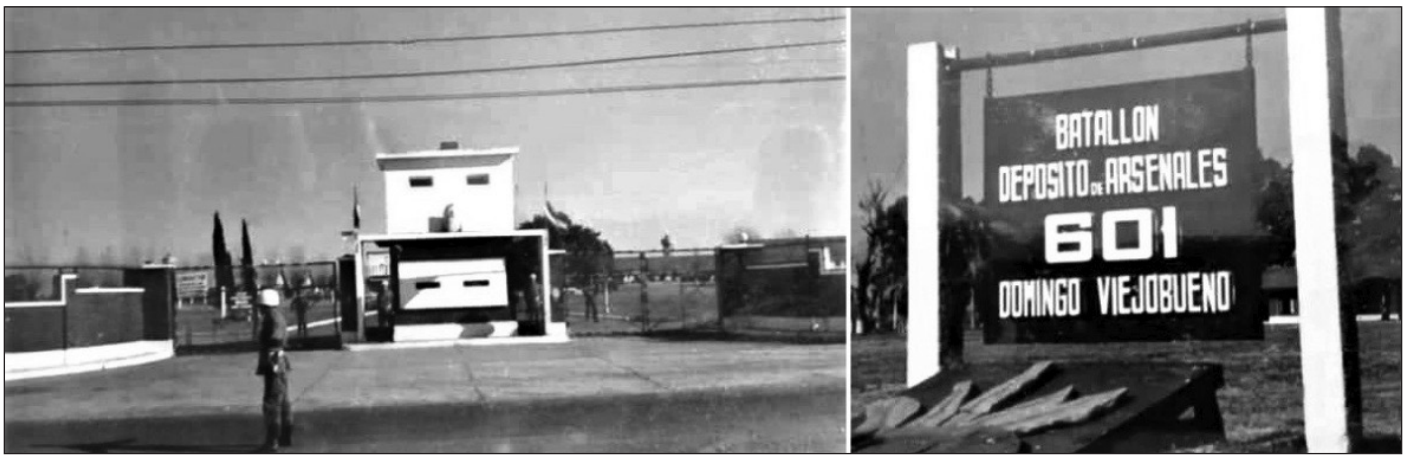
Jorge Newbery Metropolitan Airport in Buenos Aires in the mid-1970s (left). Patrol of the FAA rebel soldiers at *Jorge Newbery* Airport (right). (Open Source)



The rebel officers of the FAA entrenched themselves at Morón AB. (Open Source)

Army conscript Eduardo Chavanne, who was doing his military service with Army Arsenal Battalion 601 at Monte Chingolo. (*Ejército Argentino*)

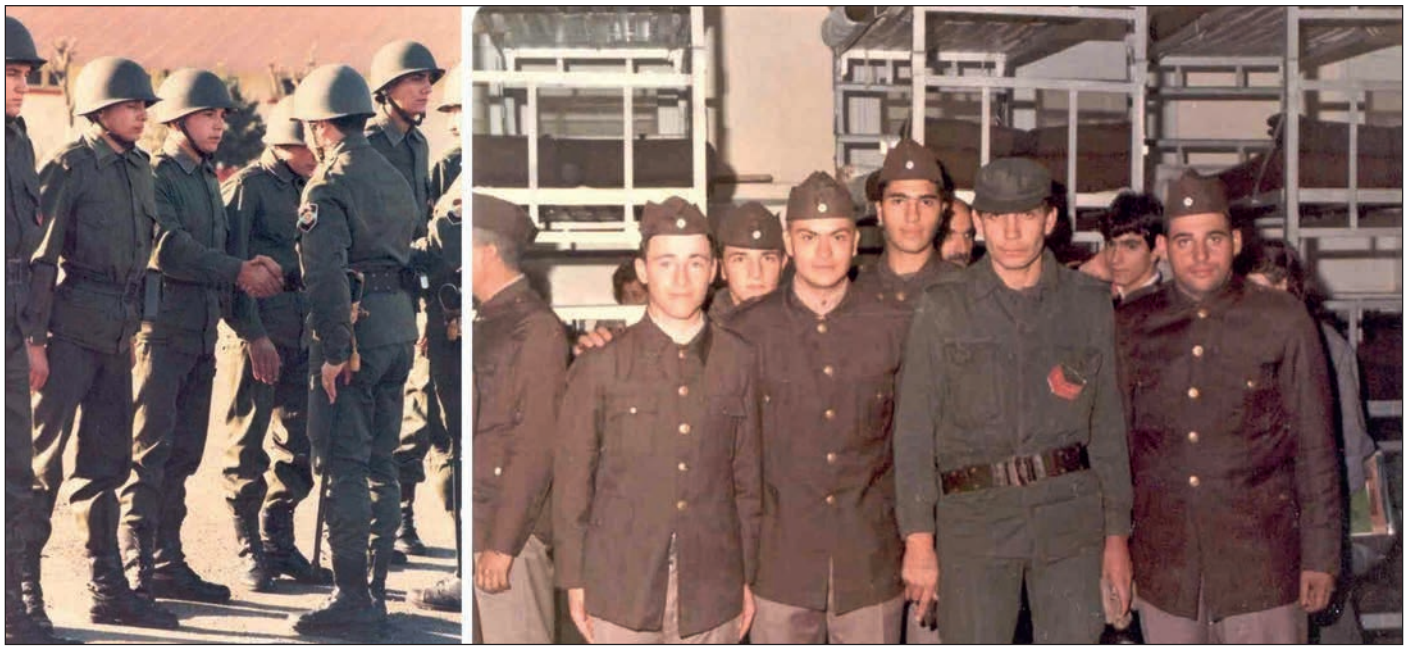
Aerial view of Army Arsenal Battalion 601 *Colonel Domingo Viejobueno* at Monte Chingolo, Lanús, south of Buenos Aires. (*Ejército Argentino*)



The main entrance to the base of Army Arsenal Battalion 601 in Monte Chingolo. (*Ejército Argentino*)

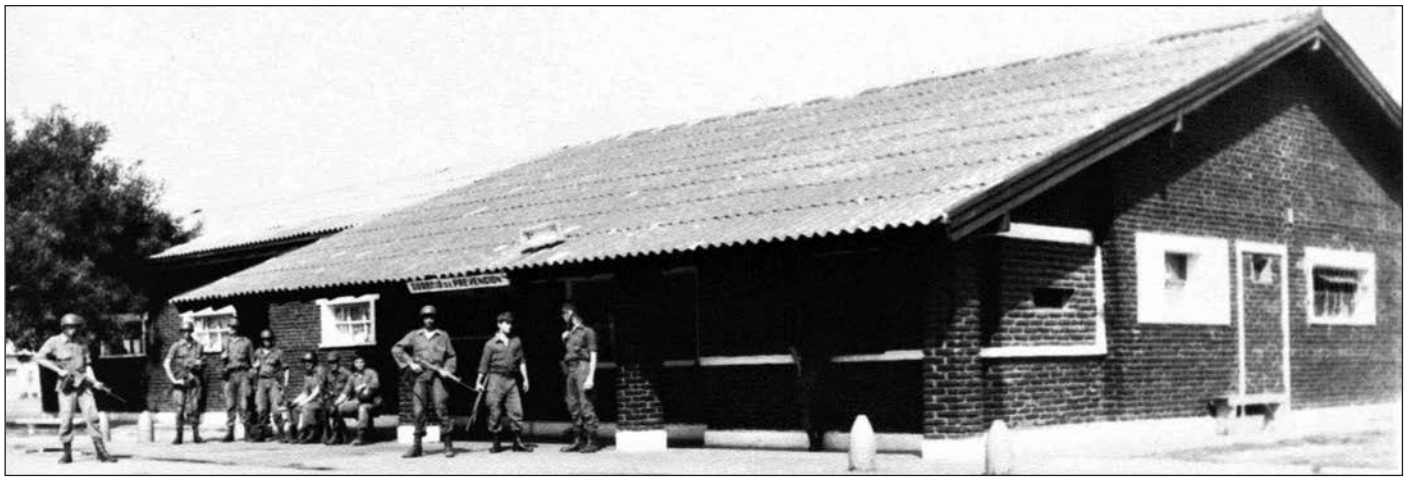
Conscript soldiers serving with the 601st Battalion proudly pose with their FAL assault rifles, with a Unimog truck (top), two M113 armoured vehicles (bottom) and an Army Aviation UH-1H at Monte Chingolo. (*Ejército Argentino*)

Conscript soldiers doing their military service in Monte Chingolo (left). Some soldiers pose with their weapons behind an M113 armoured vehicle in Monte Chingolo. (*Ejército Argentino*)

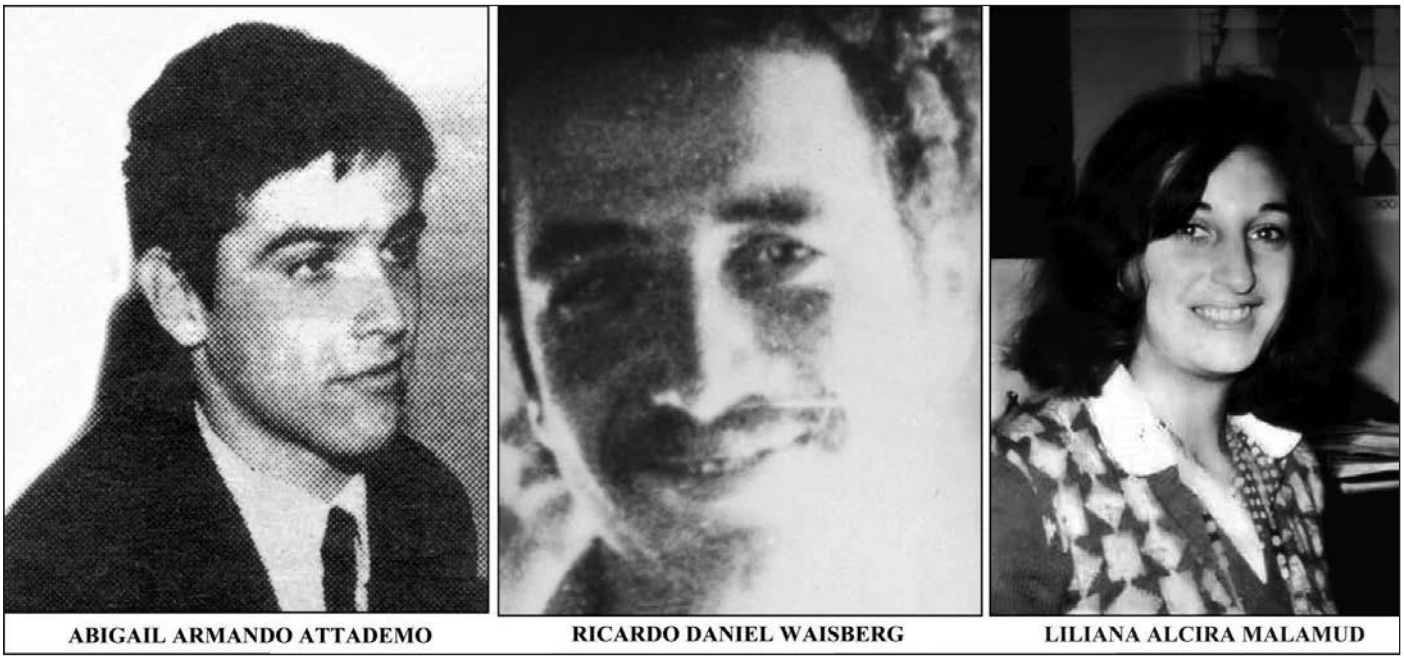


An officer greets soldiers conscripted into the Monte Chingolo Battalion 601 (left). Conscript soldiers pose with a corporal in the sleeping quarters (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

A sergeant poses with several soldiers next to a Ford F100 patrol truck, with a heavy machine gun on top, inside the 601 Battalion base in Monte Chingolo. (*Ejército Argentino*)



The guardhouse of Battalion 601 in Monte Chingolo. (*Ejército Argentino*)



The three ERP subversives who led the attack on Army Battalion 601 in Monte Chingolo on 23 December 1975. (Open Source)

An FAA Canberra bomber with a display of the types of bombs and rockets it could carry. (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

LA NACION

Año 106 - Núm. 37.380 — 2 Secciones — Buenos Aires, viernes 26 de diciembre de 1975

Pasarían de 100 los extremistas muertos

Conócense nuevos pormenores de los acontecimientos ocurridos en Monte Chingolo y en otros lugares de la Capital y la provincia

El comandante general del Ejército, saluda en la zona de operaciones de Tucumán a los efectivos militares

The cover of *La Nación* newspaper of Buenos Aires in its edition of 26 December 1975, its main headline stating: 'The number of dead extremists would exceed 100'. In the photo, an Army officer greets soldiers who still wore the Swiss M18 helmet. (*Diario La Nación*)

Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla being received by the Archbishop of Tucumán, Monsignor Blas Victorio Conrero, at *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in that city (left). A soldier prepares a Christmas tree in a camp of troops stationed in Tucumán in December 1975 (right). (Open Source)

Brigadier General Acdel Vilas with his successor, Brigadier General Antonio Bussi, at the handover of command of V Infantry Brigade in Tucumán (left and right respectively in left image). Brigadier General Antonio Domingo Bussi (right). (Open Source)

Brigadier General Antonio Bussi (second from the right) accompanies Major General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez (centre) in an inspection of troops stationed in Tucumán in early 1976. (Open Source)

Army Commander-in-Chief Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla visited the province of Tucumán several times during *Operativo Independencia*. He is shown on the left with Generals Menéndez and Bussi and on the right, in combat uniform, with Generals Galtieri and Bussi in Famaillá. (*Ejército Argentino*)

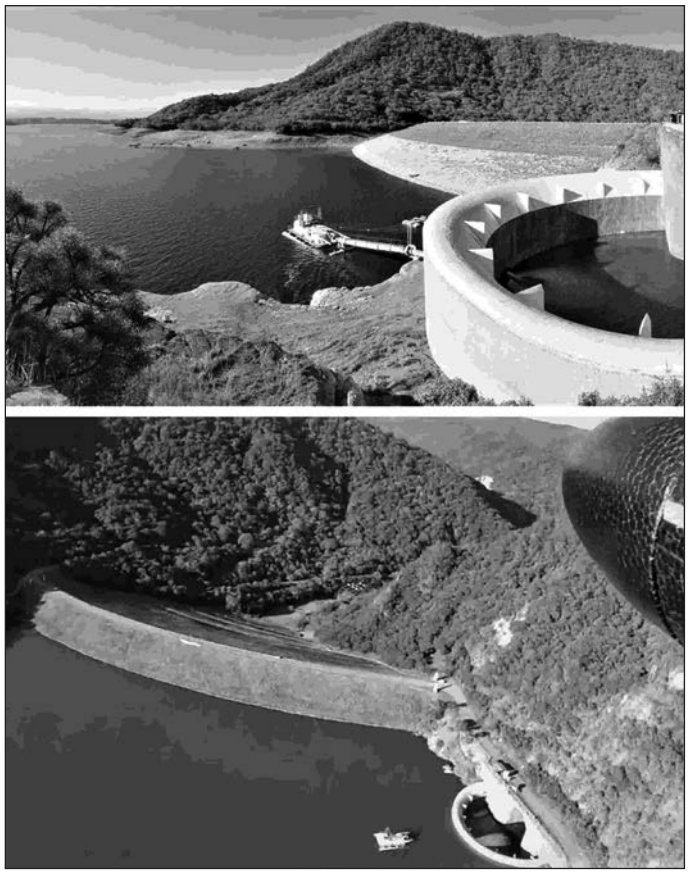
Military operations in the Tucumán jungle in the rainy season were extremely difficult, but they continued without pause. (*Ejército Argentino*)

Argentine Army soldiers raiding a house suspected of being a refuge for subversives in Tucumán (left). Faced with guerrilla sniper fire on a provincial road, troops took cover under the Unimog truck in which they had come. In the background, barely perceptible, an Army UH-1H approaches for support (right). (Open Source)

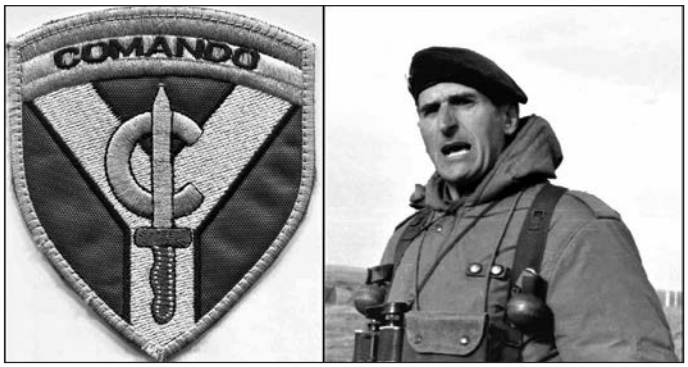
A mountain infantryman of the Argentine Army with a heavy machine gun, in the middle of the Tucumán jungle. (*Ejército Argentino*)

An Army UH-1H in a landing zone in the Tucumán jungle. (*Ejército Argentino*)

FAA Hughes 500C helicopters acquired in 1976 made their debut in *Operativo Independencia*. They were called *Avispas* (Hornets). (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)



Two views of the El Cadillal Dam, in the northern part of Tucumán, where fighting between the Army and the ERP took place in early 1976. (Open Source)

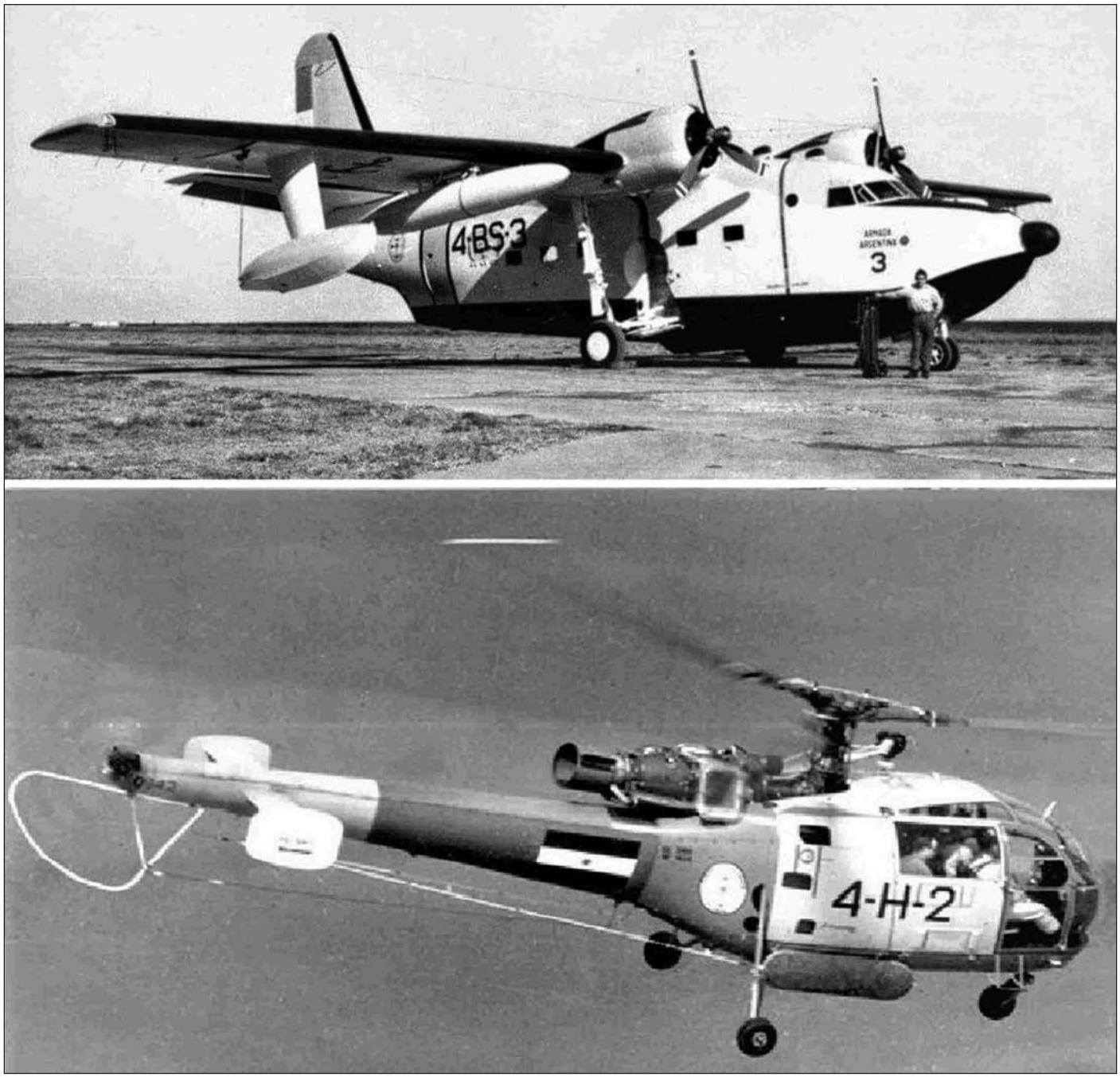


Insignia of the commando troops of the Argentine Army, and Major Mohamed Alí Seineldín, instructor and commander of the commandos. (Open Source)

The commandos were elite troops, wearing camouflage uniforms and green berets. They had their baptism of fire in *Operativo Independencia* in 1975. (*Ejército Argentino*)

An Army UH-1H inserts a commando group into a jungle clearing in Tucumán. (*Ejército Argentino*)

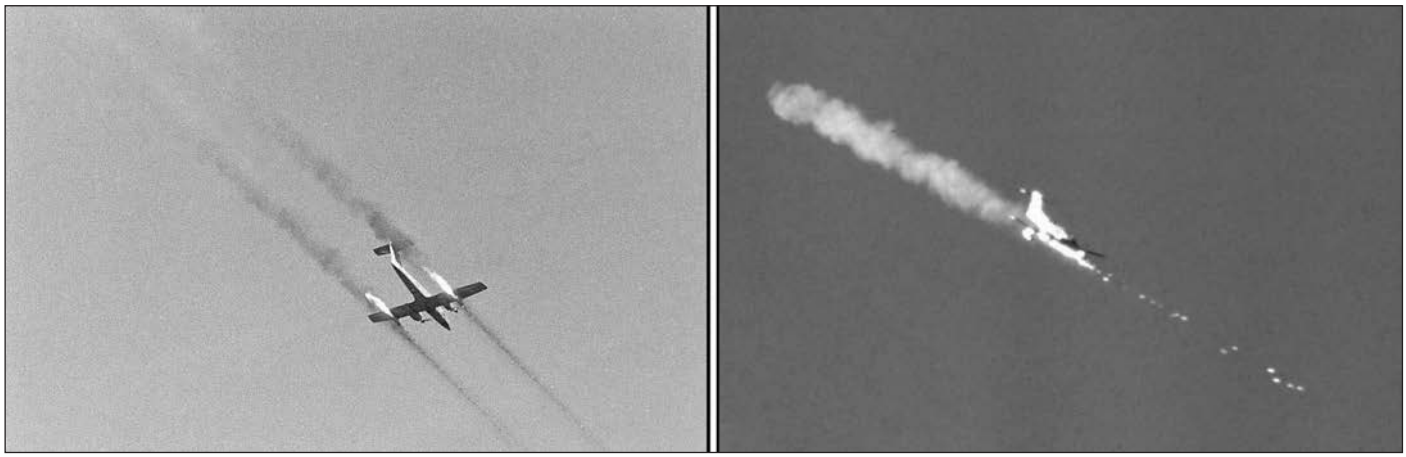
The then-Colonel Mario Benjamín Menéndez (first from the right) with another colonel, talking with Brigadier General Acdel Vilas in Famaillá at the beginning of 1975. (*Ejército Argentino*)



A Naval Aviation Grumman HU-16B Albatross (top) and an SA.316 Alouette III (bottom). (*Histarmar* Archives)

The first IA.58 Pucará attack aircraft produced carried out operational missions in Tucumán during *Operativo Independencia*. (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

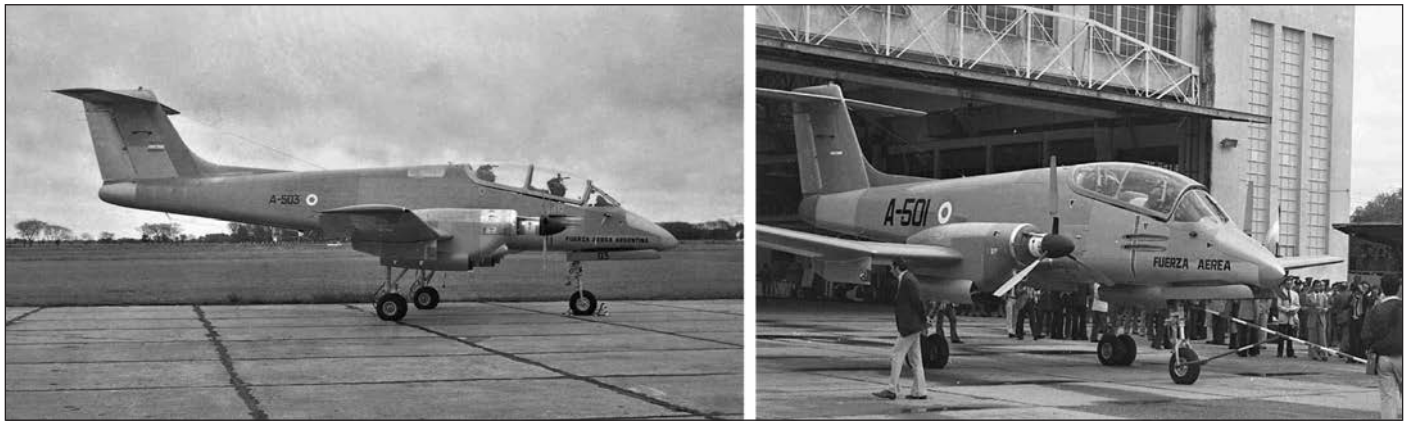
Fairchild Hiller FH-1100 helicopters of the Argentine National Gendarmerie operating in the province of Tucumán during *Operativo Independencia*. (*Gendarmería Nacional Argentina*)



IA.58 Pucará aircraft firing rockets at ground targets. (Ignacio Colliá)

An FAA armed B45 (T-34A) Mentor, used with tactical camouflage or with the natural metal scheme on the Tucumán front in 1975. (Jorge Lonardi and *Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)

Flight line of the A-4B Skyhawk at *Coronel* Pringles AB in Villa Reynolds, V Air Brigade of the FAA. (*Dirección de Estudios Históricos de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina*)



IA.58 Pucará serial A-503 at Reconquista AB in 1975 (left). (Horacio Gareiso via Vladimiro Cettolo). The roll out of IA.58 Pucará, serial A-501, at the Military Aircraft Factory (*Fábrica Militar de Aviones*, FMA) in Córdoba in 1975 (right). (via Vladimiro Cettolo)

Brigadier General Antonio Bussi, commander of the V Infantry Brigade in operations in Tucumán (second from the left), with Major General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez, commander of the III Army Corps (centre), in a sugar cane field in Tucumán in early 1976. (Open Source)

Deployment of Argentine Army troops in trucks from Famaillá to the jungle of Tucumán. (*Ejército Argentino*)

EXPLOTA BOMBA FRENTE
COMANDO DE EJERCITO
UN CIVIL MUERTO Y 29 HERIDOS; INTERNARON
A 22 MILITARES, ENTRE ELLOS A 4 CORONELES

crónica
FIRME JUNTO AL PUEBLO

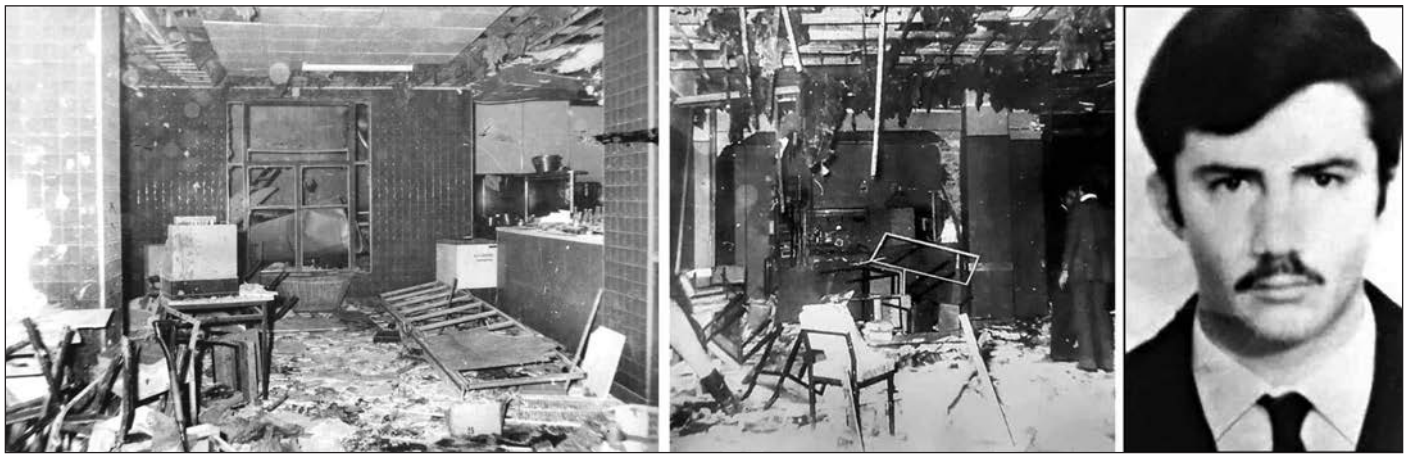
ATAQUE TERRORISTA. Un muerto y 29 heridos, algunos de ellos graves, causó la poderosa explosión que se registró esta mañana frente al Comando Central del Ejército. La bomba hizo es-
los varios automóviles estacionados en el lugar y rompió vidrios del Comando y causó [illegible] en los edificios ubicados en la avenida Paseo Colón.

The cover of the *Crónica* newspaper of 15 March 1976. The main headline states: 'A bomb exploded in front of the Army Command. One civilian dead and 29 wounded. 22 military officers, including 4 colonels were hospitalised'. (*Diario Crónica*)

The UH-1H-BF serial AE-411 of the Army Aviation, which was destroyed when it struck trees and crashed during a mission in the Caspichango River region. (Carlos Abella)

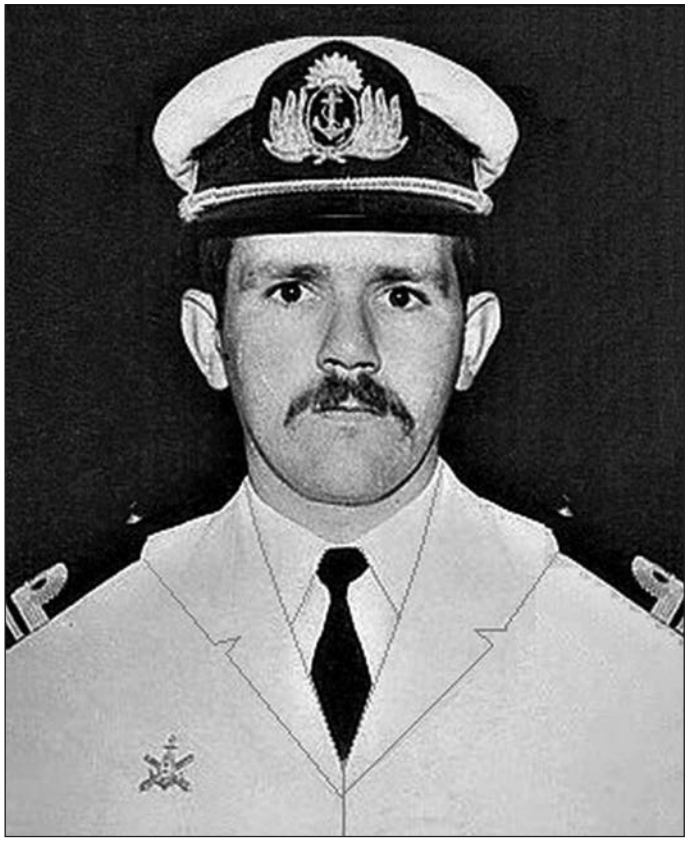
The Chief of the Argentine Federal Police (*Policía Federal Argentina*, PFA), Brigadier General Cesáreo Cardozo (first from the left), signing documents in his office in 1976. (*Policía Federal Argentina*)

Montonero subversive and assassin Ana María González (left), her victim Brigadier General Cesáreo Cardozo (centre) and the general's daughter, Graciela Cardozo (right). (CELTYV Archives)

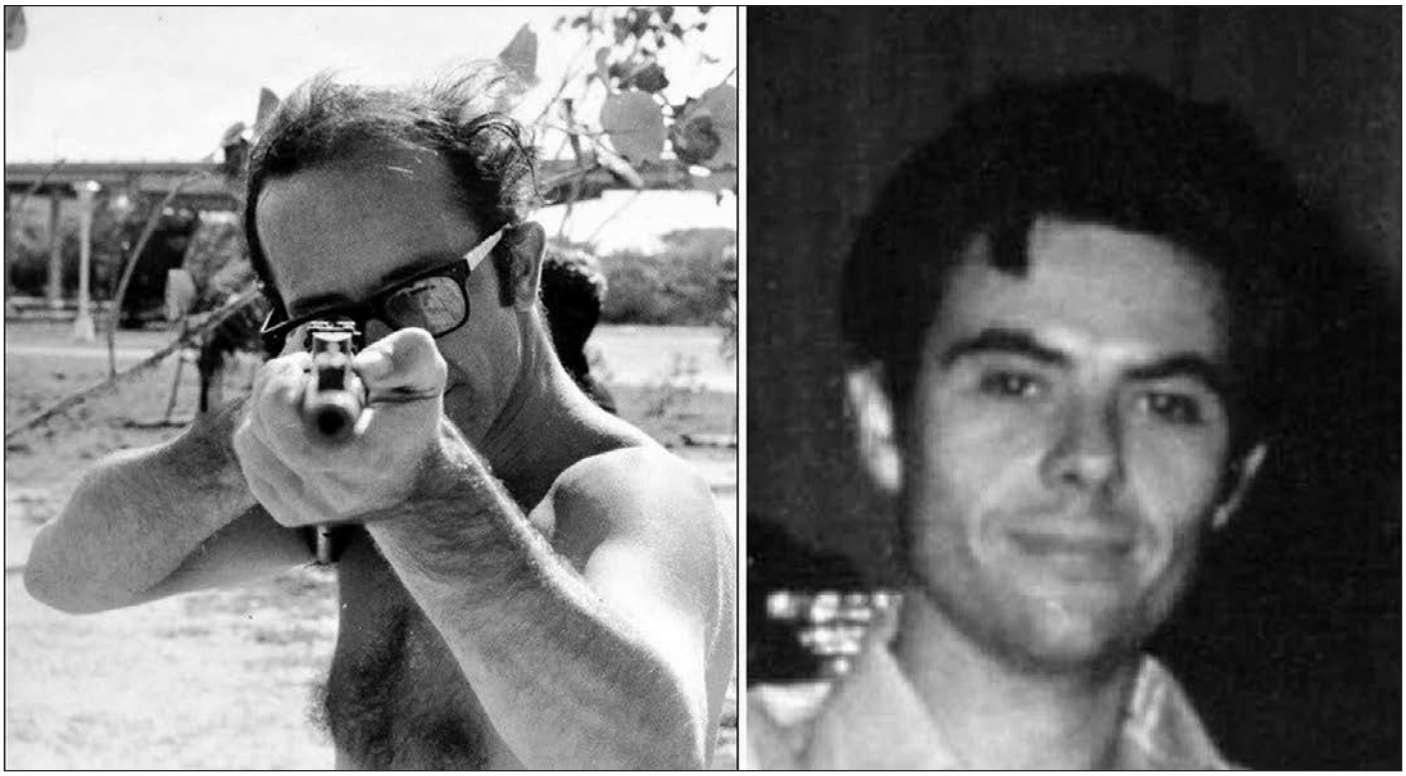


Damage caused to the dining room of the Police Federal Security Superintendence in a terrorist attack by the *Montoneros* (left and centre). Former police conscript José María Salgado, a *Montonero* insurgent (right), planted a 9kg TNT bomb that killed 22 policemen and a civilian, injuring another 60. (*Diario La Nación*)

The President of the military junta, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla, at the funeral of Brigadier General Cesáreo Cardozo in June 1976. (Open Source)

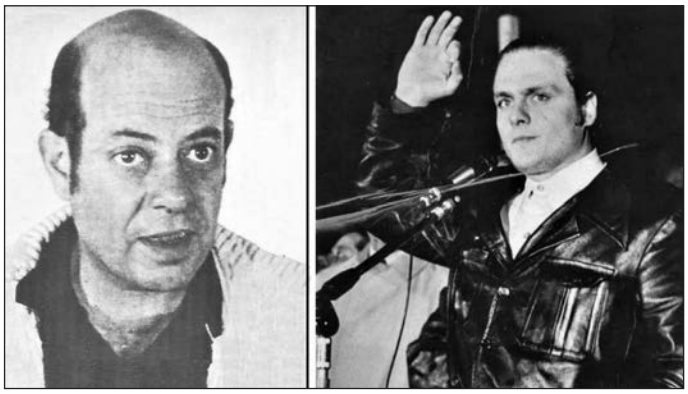


Marine Corps Lieutenant Jorge Omar Mayol heroically used his body to cover a grenade thrown by a *Montonero* subversive to save his comrades. (Afavita Archives)



The brains of the deplorable terrorist attack on the police in Buenos Aires were the *Montoneros* Rodolfo Walsh (left) and Marcelo Kurlat (right). (Open Source)

ERP commander Mario Roberto Santucho, known as *Roby* (left), was killed in an apartment in Buenos Aires in an operation led by Army Captain Juan Carlos Leonetti (right) of the 601st Intelligence Battalion, who was also killed in the raid on 19 July 1976. (Open Source)



After the death of Santucho and other ERP leaders, Enrique Gorriarán Merlo (left) and Juan Arnold Kremer (right) took over the leadership of the subversive organisation. (Open Source)

The six ERP terrorists killed on 19 July 1976 in Villa Martelli. (Open Source)

VERTICE MILITARE PER COMBATTERE IL TERRORISMO

Uccisi in Argentina un dirigente FIAT e il presidente dei mondiali di calcio

Sono stati abbattuti a raffiche di mitra l'uno a Cordova e l'altro a Buenos Aires Rapiti anche due uomini politici - Cinque estremisti morti in scontri con la polizia

DAL NOSTRO CORRISPONDENTE

BUENOS AIRES — Un commando di guerriglieri ha ucciso ieri il generale a riposo Omar Carlo Actis, presidente dell'ente che organizza i campionati mondiali di calcio che si disputeranno in Argentina nel 1978. Il generale Actis è stato ucciso a raffiche di mitra sparategli da dei furgoncini in corsa mentre, al volante della sua vettura, si recava in un rione per sottufficiali che il ministero della difesa sta costruendo nella località di Wilde situata a 17 chilometri da Buenos Aires.

A Cordova, — cioè a 700 chilometri di distanza — altri guerriglieri hanno ucciso a colpi di mitra Carlo Antonio Bergonetti, vice-direttore degli stabilimenti Mater-Fer *(materiales ferroviarios)* della Fiat, un ingegnere argentino, figlio di italiani, di 38 anni, padre di due figli, uno

Omar Carlos Actis

Mason, Gennaro Diaz Bessone e Beniamino Menendez. Tre « falchi » che, se non sono personalmente responsabili dei molti episodi di violenza registrati negli ultimi mesi, sono però da più parti accusati di non aver cercato di impedire i troppi delitti commessi da gruppi molto vicini alle forze armate.

L'uccisione di due sacerdoti irlandesi e di tre seminaristi, dell'ex presidente boliviano Juan Jose Terres e di due legislatori uruguaiani, il presidente della Camera dei deputati Gutierrez Ruiz e il senatore Michelini, hanno agghiacciato l'opinione pubblica e provocato indignazione in tutto il mondo. Questi delitti sono stati condannati sia dal Papa, sia dai massimi dirigenti politici della socialdemocrazia europea.

Il presidente Videla che, è bene ripeterlo, è un cattolico moderato, avrebbe voluto da

Ostornol Fernandez, noto come difensore di molti prigionieri politici, tra cui il segretario del PC cileno Luis Corvalan, ha sottolineato la gravità del nuovo tipo di repressione messa in atto nel suo paese.

Gli oppositori al regime infatti vengono sequestrati in gran segreto dalla polizia e tenuti prigionieri in luoghi di detenzione sconosciuti, nella maggior parte in case private della periferia.

Ostornol Fernandez, che ha potuto lasciare il suo paese dopo 15 mesi di detenzione per le sue posizioni a favore del libero esercizio della professione, grazie a pressioni internazionali, ha voluto mettere l'accento anche sulla tortura morale costituita dal completo isolamento in cui sono tenuti i nuovi prigionieri politici.

News published by the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* about the assassination of General Actis and the Vice Director of *Mater Fer*, Carlo Antonio Bergonetti. (*Corriere della Sera*)

Cadets of the Army Military School at *Benjamín Matienzo* Airport in Tucumán in July 1976, who arrived aboard an FAA C-130 (left). The use of mortars and howitzers was very limited in *Operativo Independencia* due to the characteristics of the terrain (right). (*Ejército Argentino*)

President Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla decorating a soldier wounded in combat in Tucumán in 1976 (left). Brigadier General Bussi decorating the widows of officers who fell in combat in Tucumán in 1976 (right). (Open Source)

UH-1H-BF serial AE-412 of the Argentine Army, which took part with great merit in *Operativo Independencia*. It was repaired and also saw action in the Falklands War in 1982, where it was seized by British forces in June of that year. (Horacio Gareiso via Vladimiro Cettolo)

Military Vicar Bishop Monsignor Adolfo Tórtolo (fifth from the right) with other prelates of the Tucumán Archdiocese, accompanied by senior military officers, visit a large cross erected in homage to the officers, NCOs and soldiers who fell in combat during *Operativo Independencia*. (*Ejército Argentino*)

2
THE 1976 *COUP D'ÉTAT* AND THE MILITARY JUNTA

The Last Year of Isabel Perón's Government

On 26 February 1975, the American consul in Córdoba, John Patrick Egan, was kidnapped by the *Montoneros* and assassinated. His body, wrapped in a flag of the subversive organisation, was found in a vacant lot, with his hands tied and a shot to the head.

In May that year, Brigadier General Jorge Rafael Videla engineered the replacement of the General Commander of the Argentine Army, Lieutenant General Leandro Anaya, by Lieutenant General Alberto Numa Laplane. Laplane lasted in office for barely 100 days, a period during which generals Videla and Roberto Viola organised the coup of the General Staff. Three months later, Videla ousted Numa Laplane through a putsch, with the approval of the United States Embassy. Videla belonged to the anti-Perónist Colorado military group and, along with Viola, believed that the armed forces should remain completely aloof from the ups and downs of political life in Argentina, preserving itself as 'the last bastion of the nation'. Laplane, however, along with Lieutenant General Jorge Raúl Carcagno (commander of the Argentine Army from May to December 1973) and Anaya, had maintained that the armed forces should be integrated into the institutional order, under the command of the political power. For

Fue asesinado el agente consular de EE.UU. secuestrado en Córdoba

Su cadáver acribillado a balazos fue arrojado desde una camioneta en una calle de la ciudad

Córdoba — A la 22.30 de anoche fue hallado en la calle Lamonaca, en el barrio Centro América, en la zona norte de esta capital, el cadáver del agente consular de los Estados Unidos de América en esta ciudad, señor John Patrick Egan. El cuerpo, según testigos presenciales, fue arrojado desde un "rastrojero" con caja similar a la de una ambulancia, y presentaba numerosos impactos de balas de distinto calibre. Los tripulantes del rastrojero huyeron inmediatamente tras arrojar el cadáver a la calzada, logrando alejarse del lugar.

La policía fue alertada por algunos vecinos de la zona que se hallan en las proximidades del velódromo de esta capital, y cuando los efectivos llegaron corroboraron la identidad del occiso, quien había sido secuestrado el miércoles de la presente semana a las 19.30 hora en que fue sacado de su domicilio por varios desconocidos.

Cabe recordar que con posterioridad al secuestro del cónsul, la organización terrorista Montoneros, que se adjudicó el hecho, exigió la presencia ante periodismo, de cuatro de sus integrantes, que se encontrarían detenidos. En caso contrario, dijeron en una nota, ejecutarían al diplomático extranjero en un plazo que vencía a las 19 de hoy.

El cadáver

Los restos de Egan, como dijimos, presentaban muchos impactos de bala de varios calibres, destacándose entre ellos el disparo, efectuado al parecer desde corta distancia que eliminó

"Identikit" proporcionados por la policía de la provincia, preparados con la colaboración de los testigos, en los que se reconstruyen las facciones de tres de los secuestradores del cónsul estadounidense en Córdoba, John Patrick Egan

los Estados Unidos. Esa misma persona, según confirmó la señora de Egan escabeló el grupo secuestrador, pues cuando ella les franqueó la puerta ante un llamado que pareció normal, el desconocido irrumpió violentamente y la retuvo amenazada mientras se consumaba el secuestro.

Realizado el procedimiento técnico, la policía entregó a los diarios los retratos fotocopiados para su difusión.

Pudo saberse además que la salud del señor Egan era sometida a controles médicos permanentes.

Singular coincidencia

Sigue siendo motivo de co-

Señor John Patrick Egan

Egan, lo que ocurrió dos días antes de cumplirse el secuestro.

Datos biográficos

El señor John Patrick Egan nació en Paonia, Montana, Estados Unidos, el 7 de septiembre de 1912.

Durante varios años en nuestro país y por breve lapso en el Paraguay ocupó diversos cargos en empresas industriales. Ejerció cargos de superior de

The Córdoba press announcing the assassination of the American consul in the city, John Patrick Egan. (Afavita Archives)

President María Estela Martínez (Isabel) de Perón (centre) with the military leadership, Admiral Emilio Massera, Brigadier General Héctor Fautario and Lieutenant General Alberto Numa Laplane. (Open Source)

President Isabel Perón (centre), suffering from enormous stress, requested permission to stand down on medical grounds, with Senator Dr Ítalo Lúder (second from the left) temporarily assuming the presidency. (Open Source)

his part, the governor of the province of Buenos Aires, the orthodox trade unionist Victorio Calabró, who had excellent relations with Videla and Viola, launched an 'anti-verticalist bloc' to confront Isabel Perón and campaigned to promote her fall.

In September, the President requested sick leave for health reasons, and Senator Ítalo Lúder assumed the provisional presidency. Lúder strengthened the power of the military and sanctioned, at their request, three decrees that extended the order to annihilate guerrilla action: he created a National Defence Council controlled by the armed forces and placed the Federal and Provincial Police under Army orders. One of the Army's first decisions was to militarise the country in five zones, with each corps commander having autonomy to order any repressive actions they deemed necessary, including the establishment of detention and torture centres. Lúder also announced that the elections scheduled for March 1977 would be brought forward and would be held in the second half of 1976. In a meeting of the high commands of the Army led by the then Commander General of the Army, Lieutenant General Videla, with the participation of French and American military advisers, a National Counterinsurgency Strategy was secretly approved, which ordered the dispensing of the procedures and guarantees of the rule of law and the carrying out of repressive actions clandestinely and without recognition by state authorities. On 23 October 1975, at the XI Conference of American Armies held in Montevideo, Videla publicly declared: 'If necessary, in order to achieve peace in the country, all the necessary people must die in Argentina'.[1]

During October, Isabel Perón took over the presidency again, hindering the 'bordaberrization'[2] to which Lúder's management was leading. Isabel was determined not to resign or allow herself to be evicted through a political trial, strictly adhering to constitutional legality, in a national and international context in which the support that the government could receive was increasingly scarce. Perón's excellent relationship with the radical leader Ricardo Balbín had vanished, and the main newspapers began to demand that the armed forces once again take power.

Several discussions were held between the military leadership and Senator Lúder to probe whether he would assume the effective presidency after the politicians themselves removed Mrs Perón, but the Senator did not want to 'betray' the President, so the military had to lead the coup. The violence of the terrorist groups, political assassinations, disorder of the trade unionists, terrible management of the economy, shortage of basic products and leftist politicisation of schools and universities all combined to lead to the coup.

On 25 December 1975, Lieutenant General Videla issued an ultimatum to the government to abandon power within the next 90 days.

At the end of 1975, the government announced the advancement of the presidential elections for October 1976. Aware that the *coup d'ĕtat* was in full swing, the Perónist legislators were divided into two sectors: the verticalists maintained that the only possibility of reaching the October elections was to respect the institutional framework that Isabel Perón represented, while another sector, led by Lúder, was in favour of the President's resignation and her replacement by a civilian, Lúder himself, or a retired military man with military support. A sector of radicalism, led by Fernando de la Rúa, preferred removing President de Perón through a political trial, which was rejected by the majority Justicialist legislators. In December 1975, supporters of the Minister of Welfare, José López Rega, separated from their Justicialist bloc in the Parliament, and the Justicialist Party lost its majority, being reduced from 142 representatives to just 102, against the 129 of the opposition and the anti-verticalists, with another 12 being independents. Years later, Videla recounted a meeting in which Ricardo Balbín asked him for the armed forces to carry out a coup 'as soon as possible' and to overthrow the constitutional government.

The United States Department of State supported the Argentinian military. Two days after the coup of 24 March 1976, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger ordered that the military junta be 'encouraged' and offered financial support. Meanwhile, US Ambassador Robert Hill described the coup as the 'most civilized in the country's history'.[3]

Days before the coup, a group of representatives of the Jewish community in Argentina met at the headquarters of the Delegation of Argentine Israeli Associations (*Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas*, DAIA) with General Videla and Admiral Emilio Massera, head of the ARA, who warned of their plans to execute the coup that week. The community leaders pledged their support in exchange for a special loan to reform the DAIA headquarters at 633 Pasteur Street in Buenos Aires, which would be granted two days after the coup. The Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina,* AMIA) also had its offices in the same building. Despite a certain anti-Semitic character, the military junta maintained strong

A meeting between the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla (second from the left), and the Provisional President, Dr Ítalo Lúder (centre). (Open Source)

Although smiling slightly in the photo, President Isabel Perón's relationship with military commanders was very tense in late 1975 and early 1976. The military tried by all means to get her to resign, but she refused, making a coup inevitable. (*Diario Clarín*)

ties with the leadership of the community, especially with the DAIA, with whom Videla was a regular guest at *Rosh Hashanah* toasts, as well as with the state of Israel, together with the United States, one of the main international allies of the regime. In 1977, ties were strengthened through close collaboration between Israel's Mossad and the Secretariat of Intelligence of the State (*Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado*, SIDE). It is important to note that the Argentine insurgent organisations had close ties with a number of Middle Eastern terrorist groups, which were sworn enemies of Israel.

Since mid-1975, a business delegation led by José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, president of the Argentine Business Council, had secretly met with the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Videla, to express their concerns that 'freedom of work, production, and productivity were being impeded', and to request that the armed forces ensure 'the rule of order over all things'.[4] From that moment on, meetings between businessmen and the military became more frequent, via the mediation of Jaime Perriaux, director of companies such as La Vascongada and Citroën. The last of these meetings was held with Admiral Massera. After 24 March 1976, the business organisations committed to the coup became strongly linked with the economy of the new civil-military government. The Argentine Business Council, in the person of its president, Martínez de Hoz, received the Ministry of Economy; The Livestock Secretariat corresponded to the Argentine Rural Society, represented by Jorge Zorreguieta; The Central Bank was handed over to the Association of Private Banks of Argentine Capital (Adeba), represented by Adolfo Diz; and Guillermo Walter Klein, from the Argentine Chamber of Commerce, was appointed Secretary of Programming and Economic Coordination.

In October 1975, the military and businessmen began to meet with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which promised not to oppose the coup. Likewise, the military considered that political parties such as the Radical Civic Union (*Unión Cívica Radical*, UCR), the Federal Party and the Justicialist Party would offer no significant resistance to the *coup d'état*.

On 29 December, the armed forces high command sent the Military Vicar, Monsignor Adolfo Tórtolo, to notify the President of the summons to resign, making it clear that it was a non-negotiable demand. On 5 January 1976, Isabel Perón met with the three commanders, who, in an extremely tempestuous meeting, demanded her resignation. Isabel refused, ratified the need to preserve constitutional institutions until the presidential elections – which were due to be held in October that year – and sought the protection of the Holy See, resorting to the Nuncio Monsignor Pío Laghi. The latter in turn met with the United States Ambassador, Robert Hill, one of the main supporters of Videla and Viola, but the mediation of the Holy See came to nothing. From that meeting between the President and the three armed forces commanders, the fate of the constitutional government of Argentina was defined.

In January 1976, Isabel de Perón reorganised her cabinet, getting rid of trade unionists and moderate politicians. The trade unionists – who at the time were divided between those loyal to the President, led by Lorenzo Miguel, and those who wanted her to be removed – chose to take a passive line, as they did not want to oppose her at a time when they saw her overthrow as inevitable.

In February 1976, General Roberto Eduardo Viola drew up the plan of operations for the coup. It comprised anti-subversive actions, with the clandestine detention of activists and opponents, from the very night of the coup. The majority of the general population, businessmen, police and military forces were fed up with the inept government, the nation's serious economic crisis, extreme violence from guerrilla groups and the paramilitary Triple A murders. At the beginning of 1976, the international reserves of the Argentine Central Bank had fallen to $617.7 million, compared to the $1,340.8 million a year earlier. General inflation rocketed from 24 percent in 1974 to 182 percent the following year. In addition, there was a shortage of many essential products, including food, fuel and other transportation supplies. On 9 February, the best-known political journalist in the country, Bernardo Neustadt, closed his programme *Tiempo Nuevo* (New Time) by staring at the camera and demanding the resignation of the President, stating: 'Ma'am, why don't you do yourself a favour and do it to all of us? Free yourself! Leave the presidency for someone more capable to take over'.[5]

Several days later, the head of the intelligence services, General Otto Paladino, pressured Isabel again to resign, arguing that, otherwise, 'a lot of blood would be shed'. Isabel then informed her Minister of Defence, José Deheza, the reason for her obstinance: 'Look, doctor, I won't resign even if they shoot me. Because resigning here would be validating what is going to come later'.[6]

Robert Hill (second from the left) being sworn in before a federal judge to assume the post of United States Ambassador to Argentina, along with his wife (third from left) and the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger (left). (Open Source)

The AMIA headquarters building in Buenos Aires (left). The building was destroyed in a Hezbollah terrorist attack in 1994, causing 85 deaths. (*Diario Clarín*). The logos of AMIA and DAIA (right). (Open Source)

The press campaign in favour of the military coup began before 24 March 1976. From early March, most of the Argentine print media began to dedicate more space within their editions to news and topics relating to the armed forces, their members and their activities. The magazines *Somos*, *Gente* and *Para Ti*, belonging to the *Atlántida* publishing group, were among those that most supported and disseminated the pro-coup campaign. Even the subversive *Montoneros* group, with their leader, Mario Firmenich, had stated that they would do nothing to prevent the military coup because it was also part of the internal struggle within the Perónist movement, a position that was shared by the ERP leadership. It would be the perfect excuse for both terrorist groups to declare an open war against the state, which would be led by a 'military dictatorship' supported by the 'American Empire'.

The *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper in Britain had published an article on the Argentine situation entitled 'A country in love with death'. According to the article, Argentina was suffering with an inflation that had broken the sound barrier and there was an orgy of murders carried out by both the political right and left, in which the country was heading was heading towards disintegration.

In the meantime, between 25 November and 1 December 1975, the first working meeting of intelligence agencies from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay had been held in Santiago de Chile to discuss the subversive situation in each country. The Chilean delegation proposed the creation of a control and security office, starting *Operación Condor* (Operation Condor). Brazil would join the group later. After the coup of 24 March 1976, Condor received a major boost. The operation involved, officially and directly, the monitoring, surveillance, detention, interrogation with torture, transfer between countries and 'disappearance' of people considered by those regimes as subversives, guerrillas or terrorists. Such actions were strongly supported by the United States within the framework of the national security doctrine during the Cold War, to prevent the spread of Communism in Latin America. Condor was born as a response to the JCR, founded in 1974, that brought together the Argentine PRT-ERP, the Chilean Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement of Uruguay and the Bolivian National Liberation Army, coordinated by the Communist Party of Cuba.

While the crisis worsened in the closing months of the Perónist government, the heads of the armed forces worked hard to prepare their plans for the future military government. Inter-force compatibility teams (ECIs) were formed, the crucial issue being the economy, which was in a dire situation, so the military high command consulted with several renowned economists in the country, including José Martínez de Hoz.

The Coup: *Operación Aries*

The 1976 *coup d'ětat* in Argentina deposed the three constitutional powers presided over by Isabel de Perón on Wednesday, 24 March. The coup installed a civil-military government that called itself the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganisation Process) and was characterised by implementing a systematic plan of wiping out terrorism through the annihilation of all the guerrilla organisations, including their combatants, logistical supporters and even sympathisers.

In the days prior to the coup, troops from the 7th Infantry Regiment of La Plata and from the Marine Infantry had been mobilising. Armoured units with M113 vehicles and Sherman tanks were also deployed from Campo de Mayo. In addition, all the major newspapers in the country carried headlines about the imminence of a military coup.

On Tuesday, 23 March, the Minister of Defence, José Deheza, who had been in office for just 12 days, received the heads of the three armed forces in his office: Lieutenant General Jorge Videla (Army), Admiral Eduardo Massera (ARA) and Brigadier General Orlando Agosti (FAA). During the meeting, Deheza asked the military leaders to deny the rumours of a coup, but they refused to do so. That day, President de Perón held her last Cabinet meeting to listen to Deheza's report, at the same time as Army troops began to be deployed near the seat of government.

Shortly before 1:00 a.m. on the 24th, Isabel Perón got ready to go to the presidential residence in Quinta de Olivos aboard the presidential helicopter, the FAA Sikorsky S-58T serial H-02. She boarded the helicopter together with her private secretary, Julio González, bodyguard Rafael Luisi, an officer of the Army Infantry Regiment *Patricios* and her naval aide-de-camp, Frigate Lieutenant Antonio Diamante. Right after take-off from Casa Rosada heliport, the pilots diverted towards *Jorge Newbery* Metropolitan Airport, citing alleged technical problems. *Operativo Perdíz* (Operation Partridge) was beginning, with the arrest of the President. The operation was

In October 1975, the high command of the armed forces began to meet with the highest ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Argentine Catholic Church, which was basically not opposed to a coup. (Open Source)

Military Vicar Monsignor Adolfo Tórtolo (left), naval *aide-de-camp* Captain Aurelio Carlos Martínez (centre) and President Isabel Perón (right) during her convalescence at the end of 1975. The meeting was held in the bedroom of the presidential residence in Olivos. (Open Source)

From left to right, Metalworkers Union (UOM) leader Lorenzo Miguel, President Isabel Perón, General Labour Confederation (CGT) head Casildo Herreras and Economy Minister Eugenio Mondelli during Mrs Perón's address to the CGT on 10 March 1976. Her days as President of Argentina were now numbered. (César Cichero)

carried out at *Jorge Newbery* Airport and not at Casa Rosada, due to the refusal of the Grenadier Regiment to take the President into custody. Once the Sikorsky landed there, the President was received by Brigadier General José Rogelio Villarreal, Rear Admiral Pedro Santamaría and Brigadier Basilio Lami Dozo, who told her that the armed forces had taken over political power, and that she had been dismissed and was under arrest. She tried to protest the situation but was told that her close collaborators had painted for her a picture of an ideal country, one that did not actually exist. At 1:50 a.m., she was flown to Neuquén aboard an FAA aircraft to be confined at El Messidor, the official residence of the governor in Villa La Angostura. A few months later, she was transferred to the Azul Naval Arsenal, in the province of Buenos Aires. She would only be released five years later in July 1981 and sent into exile to Spain. The coup was carried out without any opposition and without a single shot being fired. Nobody came out in defence of Isabel Perón. The bulk of the civilian population, the opposition parties and even the Communist Party supported the coup. At the time of the publication of this work, former President Isabel de Perón was still living in Spain, aged 93.

In the meantime, Army troops occupied Government House and all government buildings in the provinces. At 03:10 a.m., all television and radio stations were also occupied by police and Army forces. Regular programming was cut and the first statement regarding the coup was read out by the announcer Juan Vicente Mentesana:

> *Communiqué* number one of the Board of General Commanders: The population is informed that as of this date, the country is under the operational control of the Military Junta. It is recommended that all inhabitants strictly comply with the provisions and directives emanating from military, security or police authorities, as well as [take] extreme care in avoiding individual or group actions and attitudes that may require the drastic intervention of personnel in operations. Signed: Jorge Rafael Videla, Lieutenant General, Commander General of the Army; Emilio Eduardo Massera, Admiral, General Commander of the Navy; Orlando Ramón Agosti, Brigadier General, Commander General of the Air Force.[7]

The military commanders declared that the mandates of the President, the governors and deputy governors of the provinces, the federal inspectors and the mayor of Buenos Aires had expired. They dissolved the National Congress and the provincial legislatures and dismissed the members of the Supreme Court of Justice. The national government structure was completed with the Legislative Advisory Commission (CAL), made up of three high-ranking officers appointed by each force, with legislative advisory powers on behalf of the armed forces. Army troops occupied the main government buildings. Political activity in schools and universities, as well as political parties, was prohibited. All unions were outlawed by the new authorities, their funds being frozen, and strikes were declared illegal.

A state of siege and martial law were implemented, and military patrols were established in all cities. Hours later, *Operativo Bolsa* (Operation Bag) was carried out, which consisted of the arrest of high-ranking Perónist officials, legislators and CGT trade unionists. Former President Cámpora and Perónist leader Juan Manuel Abal Medina took refuge in the Mexican Embassy. On 29 March, General Videla took office as President of Argentina, also maintaining the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The military junta dedicated itself to the political aspects of government and eliminating any subversion. Special military courts martial were established with powers to even issue death sentences for crimes committed by insurgents. On 2 April, the new Minister of Economy, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, who had links with the agricultural sectors, announced the neoliberal 'Recovery, Sanitation and Expansion Programme for the Argentine Economy'. The first measures of the military government were the freezing of salaries for three months, the elimination of price controls and a sharp devaluation of the exchange rate. The new *de facto* government was recognised by most Western countries, and just 72 hours later,

Two prominent Argentine journalists, Mariano Grondona (left) and Bernardo Neustadt (right). (Open Source)

Operation, or Plan, Condor was created to counteract the influence of the Revolutionary Coordinating Board (JCR) of various subversive organisations in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay, at the initiative of Chile. (Open Source)

Argentina recovered the credit that had been suspended due to default by the Perónist government.

In response to the military coup, ERP leader Mario Santucho had issued the slogan '*Argentinos a las armas*' (Argentines to arms) in an edition of the organisation's magazine *El Combatiente* (*The Combatant*). Both the ERP and the *Montoneros* decided to increase attacks on the security forces. They naively expected that the overthrow of a constitutional democratic government by the military would increase the support of the common people for the guerrillas, but once again they were sorely mistaken.

The military and police forces soon began to arrest people of leftist ideology who were suspected of being members of subversive organisations, of acting as logistical supporters for those groups or being merely sympathisers, including union leaders, university students, infiltrators in factories and even supporters within the armed forces or police. The distribution of political propaganda of insurgent organisations was explicitly prohibited, with the death penalty and courts martial imposed through Law No. 21,264. Any incitement to collective violence that disturbed public order was punished with up to 10 years in jail. Likewise, anyone in any way attacking the country's means of transportation, communication, power plants, gas installations or running water or other public services was to be punished with imprisonment for a determined time or death. Laws were passed allowing the military and police forces to use weapons to repress any such events. War Councils were also formed for the prosecution of these 'crimes', the law being applicable to all persons aged 16 years or older.

The military regime, through Minister of Education Ricardo Pedro Bruera, established strict control of the nation's universities and high schools, which until 1976 had been hotbeds for future guerrilla members or collaborators. All left-leaning professors, teachers, principals or deans were fired, and students were forced to abide by strict rules of conduct, with no protest allowed. Any agitating students were suspended, and if they reoffended, they were expelled from the institutions where they studied. Unfortunately, many innocent people were sucked up in those procedures.

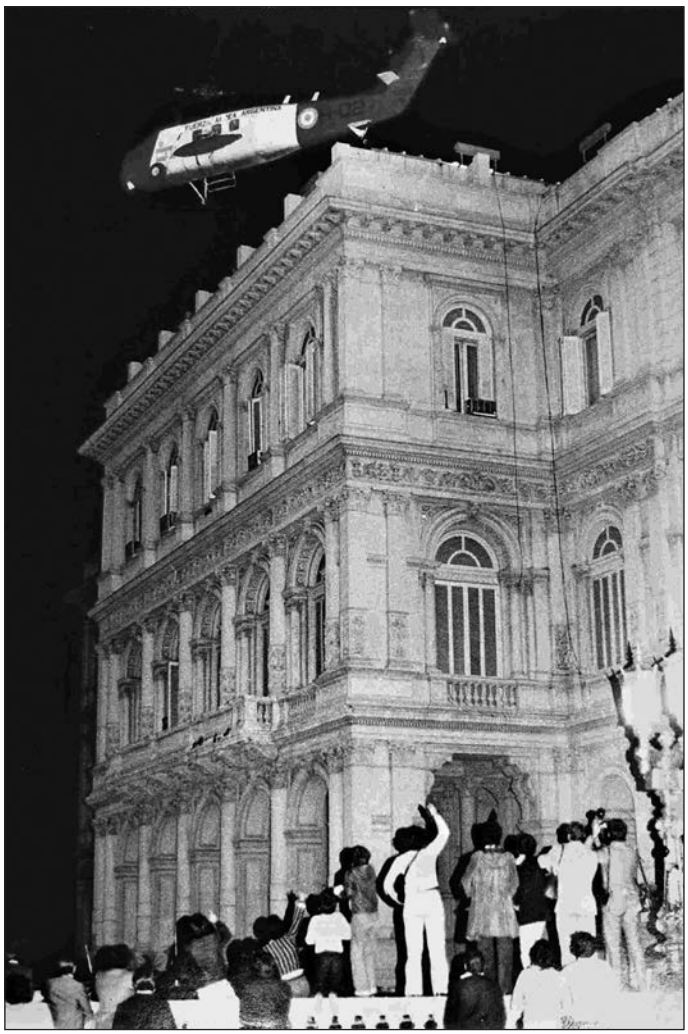
Task groups were established for the capture of subversive elements, collaborators and sympathisers. In the case of the ARA, those groups were coordinated by ARA Captain Rubén Jacinto Chamorro, Director of the Navy Mechanics School (*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*, ESMA), who reported directly to Admiral Massera. In the case of the Army, Intelligence Battalion 601 was in charge of the task forces, under the command of Brigadier General Carlos Alberto Martínez, with the assistance of Colonel Alberto Valín Molina. In both cases, the military had the collaboration of the Federal Police. Arrests were carried out immediately when a target was located, either in their place of work or study, on the street or at home, and they were immediately taken to detention centres. The usual procedure was to subject the detainees to torture, to facilitate the extraction of information that would allow the capture of more subversive members or their logistics chain, as well as plans for future terrorist actions. Normally, after exhaustive interrogation, if the detainee was found innocent, he or she was released with a warning not to discuss their detention with anyone. However, if the detainee was indeed found to be an insurgent or a member of a subversive group's logistics chain, the story was different. If he collaborated with the security forces, his life would be saved (although it was often the case that if he was released, his subversive comrades would kill him for having collaborated with the forces of repression); but if not, the detainee would be 'disappeared'. Members of the ERP were considered irretrievably indoctrinated, therefore unfit to live in society, and were sentenced to death. In the case of the *Montoneros*, however, it was thought that they were 'recoverable', their collaboration was sought and they could be released, but many of them refused and suffered the same fate as their ERP comrades. It should be noted that many arrests of subversives and their collaborators were carried out based on information from their own victims or close relatives, even by ordinary people, who did not agree with their terrorist activities. This caused the total collapse of the guerrilla groups after the 1976 coup. Most of those sentenced to death were shot and buried in mass graves, but some hundreds of the most dangerous of them were sedated, taken aboard military aircraft and dumped into the Atlantic Ocean, far offshore. According to the law in force at the time, all persons captured by the security forces, once interrogated, had to be handed over to the justice system for trial. In the beginning, this was indeed done, but many insurgents were released again 'in the absence of evidence', and many judges themselves did not dare to pronounce sentences against them for fear of suffering attacks on their lives and their families. That was the reason why the security forces took charge of those captured, as outlined above.

Nevertheless, in a nighttime operation in April 1976, as a demonstration that the *Montoneros* was still very active, a commando group placed explosive charges in six Dassault Mirage IIIEAs of the FAA's 8th Fighter Group at Mariano Moreno AB, headquarters of VIII Air Brigade. However, the explosives failed to detonate and when found were disarmed by FAA personnel.

The mobilisation of troops and military vehicles in the days before the coup was clear for all to see. Soldiers in an Army Unimog truck near the Casa Rosada (top left), military jeeps patrolling the streets of Buenos Aires (top right), an M113 armoured vehicle with a crew of armed soldiers in Buenos Aires traffic (bottom left) and soldiers standing guard at the Casa Rosada. M113 and M3 vehicles and military trucks are visible in the background (bottom right). (*Diario La Nación*)

The FAA Sikorsky S-58T serial H-02, used as a presidential helicopter, would play a key role in the events of the early morning of 24 March 1976. (SOP (Ret) Walter Bentancor)

The President of Argentina, Isabel Perón, about to board the presidential helicopter (left). The Sikorsky S-58T taking off from Casa Rosada heliport in the early morning of 24 March 1976 (right). (*Diario La Nación*)



A panoramic shot of the take-off of the presidential Sikorsky S-58T from Casa Rosada heliport, with some Perónist followers below. (*Diario La Nación*)

El Messidor, the official residence of the governor in Villa La Angostura, Neuquén, where former President Isabel Perón was first held. (Open Source)

The former President of Argentina, Isabel Perón, arriving in Spain to enter into exile in 1981 after five years in prison. (Open Source)

The military junta that took over the government from 24 March 1976, in Casa Rosada. From left to right on the front row, Admiral Emilio Massera, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla and Brigadier General Rolando Agosti. (Open Source)

EXTRA
LA ACTUALIDAD
24 DE MARZO DE 1976.
AMANECE. TANQUES FRENTE A LA ROSADA.
NUEVO GOBIERNO
24 DE MARZO. 10.40 DE LA MAÑANA.
JURA LA JUNTA: MASSERA. VIDELA. AGOSTI.

M113 armoured cars and Sherman Firefly tanks parked in front of Casa Rosada (left). The cover of *Gente* magazine, with Sherman tanks guarding Government House and members of the military junta (right). (*Revista Gente*)

Events during *Operación Bolsa*, with the arrest of subversives and sympathisers throughout the country, as well as senior officials and union leaders from the previous government. (Open Source)

The new Minister of Economy, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz (right), with *de facto* President Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla (left). (Open Source)

Military and police personnel arresting undocumented people suspected of being leftist sympathisers (left). Soldiers patrolling the streets of Buenos Aires on foot (right). (Open Source)

Tight control of schools and universities by the military government began soon after the coup. President Videla visiting a Catholic school (left). The new Minister of Education, Ricardo Pedro Bruera (right). (Open Source)

Rear Admiral Rubén Jacinto Chamorro (left), Director of the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA) (right), where there was a detention centre for subversives. (*Revista Gente*)

The headquarters of Army Intelligence Battalion 601, at the corner of Callao and Viamonte streets, in the city of Buenos Aires (left). Brigadier General Carlos Alberto Martínez (right), commander of Intelligence Battalion 601. (Open Source)

An FAA Dassault Mirage IIIEA fighter of the 8th Fighter Group at Mariano Moreno AB. (Horacio Gareiso via Vladimiro Cettolo)

3
THE MILITARY DEFEAT OF THE GUERRILLAS

Despite the low morale of their cadres, the *Montoneros* and the ERP continued carrying out terrorist actions against state security forces for a couple more years. The most serious terrorism-related incidents in 1977 included on 28 January, a group of *Montoneros* attacked Ciudadela Police Station, killing three policemen, and the ERP assassinated the Labour Relations Manager of the Tamet company, Pedro A. Lombardero, on 10 February.

At the end of February, most of the *Montoneros* leaders and superior officers fled the country to safety. Firmenich, Perdías, Vaca Narvaja, Yaguer and several others thus abandoned their subordinate comrades to their fate. This definitively broke the morale of the terrorist groups, which – subjected to permanent persecution – lost the initiative and surprise factor and began to disperse rapidly, deserting the organisation.

On 25 March, security forces killed the Intelligence Chief of the *Montoneros*, Rodolfo Walsh, during an armed confrontation. Six months earlier, on 29 September 1976, his daughter, María Victoria Walsh, also a *Montonero* subversive, committed suicide before falling into the hands of the security forces.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vice Admiral César A. Guzzetti, miraculously survived an assassination attempt by the *Montoneros* on 7 May. He had gone to a private clinic for medical attention when several subversives captured him and, covering his head with a pillow, fired several shots. Guzzetti was left with permanent and severe neurological injuries for the rest of his life.

During the rest of 1977, the *Montoneros* carried out several attacks with explosives against various different companies, railroads, police stations and factories, causing damage and injuries. They also murdered several businessmen and police officers.

Operación Gaviota (Operation Seagull)

Under the code name *Operación Gaviota*, the ERP planned to kill President Videla aboard the presidential plane as it took off from Buenos Aires' *Jorge Newbery* Metropolitan Airport on 18 February 1977.

Taking into account that the thickness of the airport runway was between 65cm (25½ inches) and 1 metre (3¼ feet) of extra-hard reinforced concrete, the ERP prepared two bombs. One bomb contained 65kg of explosives that was used as a base in a central charge, under the centre of the runway, made up of 30kg of TNT and the rest of gelamon. A second device, placed on the edge of the runway, under an inspection lid, had 15kg of TNT and about 50kg of gelamon. The two charges were connected in parallel to a main electrical conduction line, each having three electrical detonating capsules plus others distributed as boosters. The bombs were placed in the wide drainage pipes under the airport runway by ERP explosives specialist Eduardo Miguel Streger, known as *La Tía*. At 8:30 a.m., the presidential F-28 Mk.1000M, serial T-02 *Patagonia*, with President Videla on board, as well as Minister of Economy José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, Brigadier Oscar Caeiro and generals Osvaldo Azpitarte, José Rogelio Villareal and Albano Harguindeguy, began taxiing along the runway for take-off. An ERP forward observer gave the signal to fire via portable radio, activating the electrical system of the two bombs. However, the detonator of the main charge did not work, and when the second bomb exploded, the pilot, who had taken off sooner than anticipated, managed to balance the F-28 and continue his climbing into the morning sky. Nevertheless, for security reasons, the plane did not continue its journey to Bahía Blanca, the original destination of the trip, landing instead at Morón Military AB, where no signs of damage were found. The explosion had merely felt like turbulence to those on board the jet. However, if both of the charges had detonated, the plane would have been destroyed. The explosion left a crater approximately five metres in diameter on the runway, and the airport was temporarily closed. Scheduled flights were diverted to Ezeiza International Airport.

The *Montoneros'* Deal with the PLO

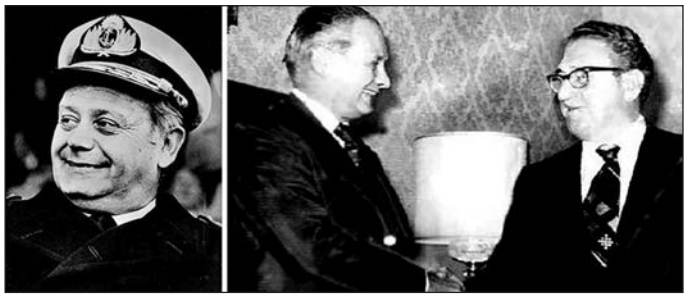
A few years beforehand, the *Montoneros* had established relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), with whom they signed logistics, documentation and arms transport agreements. In May 1977, the *Montoneros*' Firmenich and Vaca Narvaja met with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Beirut. Through the PLO's *Al Fatah* group, the *Montoneros* were offered military training and RPG-7 rocket launchers. Firmenich and Vaca Narvaja also met with Abu Jihad, whose real name was Khalil al-Wazir, leader of the *Al Fatah* armed wing. New *Montoneros* recruits were subsequently trained in shooting techniques, handling explosives and military tactics in training camps located in Beirut in Lebanon, and Tahl in Syria.

In return, the *Montoneros* agreed to set up a plastic explosives factory in southern Lebanon, under the direction of an explosives expert, the Argentine chemical engineer Horacio Mendizábal, at that time in command of the *Montoneros* fighters. Mendizábal publicly commented on the military aid received from the PLO, which alerted the Israeli intelligence service – Mossad – and the Argentinean Army's Intelligence Battalion 601. For this cardinal error, Mendizábal was dismissed by Firmenich, although he did not leave the *Montoneros*. He was replaced in the *Montoneros* hierarchy by Raúl Clemente Yaguer, known as *El Roque*. The Argentinian insurgents also received support from socialist parties in several European countries. But while such backing was fantastic as political propaganda, it did not ultimately help the *Montoneros* movement, which was already in decline.

The Last Two Years of Guerrilla Operations

By 1978, terrorist actions across Argentina were decreasing. During that year, Argentina was focused on two other very important national issues: organising the FIFA Soccer World Cup and the conflict over the Beagle Channel Islands with Chile.[1] Argentina had been chosen to hold the FIFA World Cup between 1 and 25 June 1978, with games taking place in stadiums in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Mar del Plata, Córdoba and Mendoza. Its organisation was in the hands of an entity called EAM'78 (*Ente Autárquico Mundial*, 1978 World Cup Autarchic Entity), originally led by the retired General Omar Actis, who was assassinated by the Montoneros on 19 August 1976. Although a major campaign was run by human rights organisations opposing the World Cup taking place in Argentina (suspiciously supported by Argentine terrorist groups), the event was carried off without incident, with the Argentine soccer team winning the World Cup for the first time.

Meanwhile, RPG-7 rocket launchers acquired by the *Montoneros* were sent by supporters in France and the United Kingdom and arrived by sea in Argentina hidden in a couple of cars. On 18 June 1978, the *Montoneros* used this weapon for the first time, firing it



Vice Admiral César Guzzetti, Minister of Foreign Relations of Argentina in 1976 and, on the right, with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1977. (*Diario Clarín*)

Two *Montoneros* 'intellectuals', both journalists: Rodolfo Walsh (left) and his daughter María Victoria Walsh. (Open Source)

from the sliding roof of a Peugeot 504 car against a military target, the headquarters of Army Intelligence Battalion 601, in the heart of Buenos Aires, causing material damage. Other targets were also attacked, including Government House, the ESMA, the Argentine Army Commander-in-Chief's building, the War College, the Police School and the 43rd Police Station. Despite all the attacks causing damage, there were no fatalities. Nevertheless, they were part of the subversive group's efforts in proving that it had not yet been defeated.

One of the most horrific actions carried out by the *Montoneros* took place on 1 August 1978 in Buenos Aires. The insurgents placed 25kg of nitro-glycerine in a refrigerator in an empty apartment next to that of Admiral Armando Lambruschini (second-in-command of the ARA), that when detonated killed his 15-year-old daughter, Paula, one of the admiral's staff and two neighbours, a man and an elderly woman from the adjoining apartment building. Ten other residents were wounded. The explosion destroyed four floors of the building and several cars. The explosives had been placed in the apartment by the *Montoneros*' Lucila Adela Révora de Pedro, together with Carlos Guillermo Fassano. Two weeks after the attack, Lambruschini was appointed commander of the ARA.

Operación Contraofensiva (Operation Counteroffensive)

Despite their recent activity, the end of the line for the *Montoneros* was inevitable. By the end of 1978, it had already lost 85 percent of its troops, most of them captured after being denounced by some of the group's own members who had deserted. Even so, the *Montoneros* launched *Operación Contraofensiva* (Operation Counteroffensive), the first phase of which involved the regrouping of its decimated forces and the recruitment of new troops, mainly those who had taken refuge in various countries, especially Spain and Mexico. Two new groups were formed: the Special Infantry Troops (*Tropas Especiales de Infantería*, TEI) and Special Agitation Troops (*Tropas Especiales de Agitación*, TEA). The TEA was in charge of the mobilisation of workers in Plaza de Mayo and street confrontations, while the TEI struck against transportation and communications networks in an attempt to generate chaos, also launching missions to kill various members of the government's economic team. It was a plan to overthrow what it saw as the country's military dictatorship. The plan may have been a good one, but internal crises within the *Montoneros* undermined its effectiveness. Many of its members questioned the new operation, openly saying that the group's leaders, from their comfortable exile abroad, were sending their subordinates to the slaughterhouse. In addition, the anticipated support of the unions was not forthcoming, and nor, once again, was any popular backing by the people.

In 1979, the *Montoneros* attacks became more and more sporadic, but were no less violent for that. On 27 September of that year, a group of *Montoneros* led by Raúl Clemente Yager, known as *El Roque*, raided the home of the Coordination Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, Guillermo Walter Klein, in Olivos. Two policemen were killed, while the maids of the house were seized. They insurgents captured not only Mr Klein but also his wife and four young children. They were tied up on chairs and the terrorists placed bombs all over the house, with the intention of killing the entire family. Once the terrorists left the building, they detonated the explosives and the two-storey house collapsed. Miraculously, the whole family survived with just minor injuries and were rescued by firefighters. Within a few days, the *Montoneros* group that carried out the attack was located, except for Yager; refusing to give themselves up, they were all killed by the police in a fierce firefight.

On 7 November, the *Montoneros* failed in an attempt to assassinate the National Treasury Secretary, Dr Juan Alemann. As he got into his car, he was attacked with submachine guns. The subversives also threw a hand grenade and fired an RPG-7 rocket, but without success. One policeman and Dr Alemann's driver were wounded in the attack. The terrorists then fled as other police arrived on the scene.

A few days later, on 13 November, in their last terrorist attack, the *Montoneros* killed businessman Francisco Soldati and his driver in downtown Buenos Aires. His car was blocked by a Ford pick-up truck and eight insurgents riddled it with fire from AK-47 assault rifles and Uzi submachine guns, killing the occupants. They intended to place a bomb under the car that would explode when the police approached, but the guerrilla who was handling it slipped and the bomb exploded, killing her. The three terrorists who shot Soldati fled. As police arrived, wild shooting broke out. Two other guerrillas were killed and three were wounded and captured. One police officer was killed in the shooting.

Disagreements amongst the *Montoneros* leadership became increasingly fierce, and the group's leaders, Croatto and Mendizábal, were both killed in an armed confrontation. Several other *Montoneros* leaders were also captured, which brought to an end *Operación Contraofensiva*, having achieved only meagre results. More than 600 *Montonero* troops died during the operation, including the heads of the TEI and TEA themselves. With the continuous failures, the main leaders being safely outside the country in exile, the vast majority of the cadres being captured or eliminated and there being growing disputes between antagonistic internal groups, the once-powerful *Montoneros* terrorist organisation ceased its armed struggle in December 1980. The surviving elements leaned one again towards Perónism. The ERP was also history by then.

The military juntas continued to govern Argentina with an iron fist, with the arrests of members and sympathisers of subversive groups continuing for several. There were changes in the nation's

The passenger terminal building of *Jorge Newbery* Metropolitan Airport in Buenos Aires (left). An overview of the airport (right). (Open Source)

The presidential Fokker F-28 Mk.1000M, serial T-02 *Patagonia*. (Paul Moreau)

military leadership and even an international war, over possession of the Falkland Islands/Malvinas, against the United Kingdom in 1982, with disastrous results for Argentina. All the positives achieved from the fight against the subversives were thrown away by defeat in the Falklands. The military fell into deep disrepute and had to cede power to a civilian administration in 1983 after democratic elections.

Meanwhile, many of the exiled leaders of the ERP and *Montoneros* joined the Sandinistas in their fight against the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, and even carried out his assassination in 1980 while he was in exile in Paraguay.[2]

Army Intelligence Operations

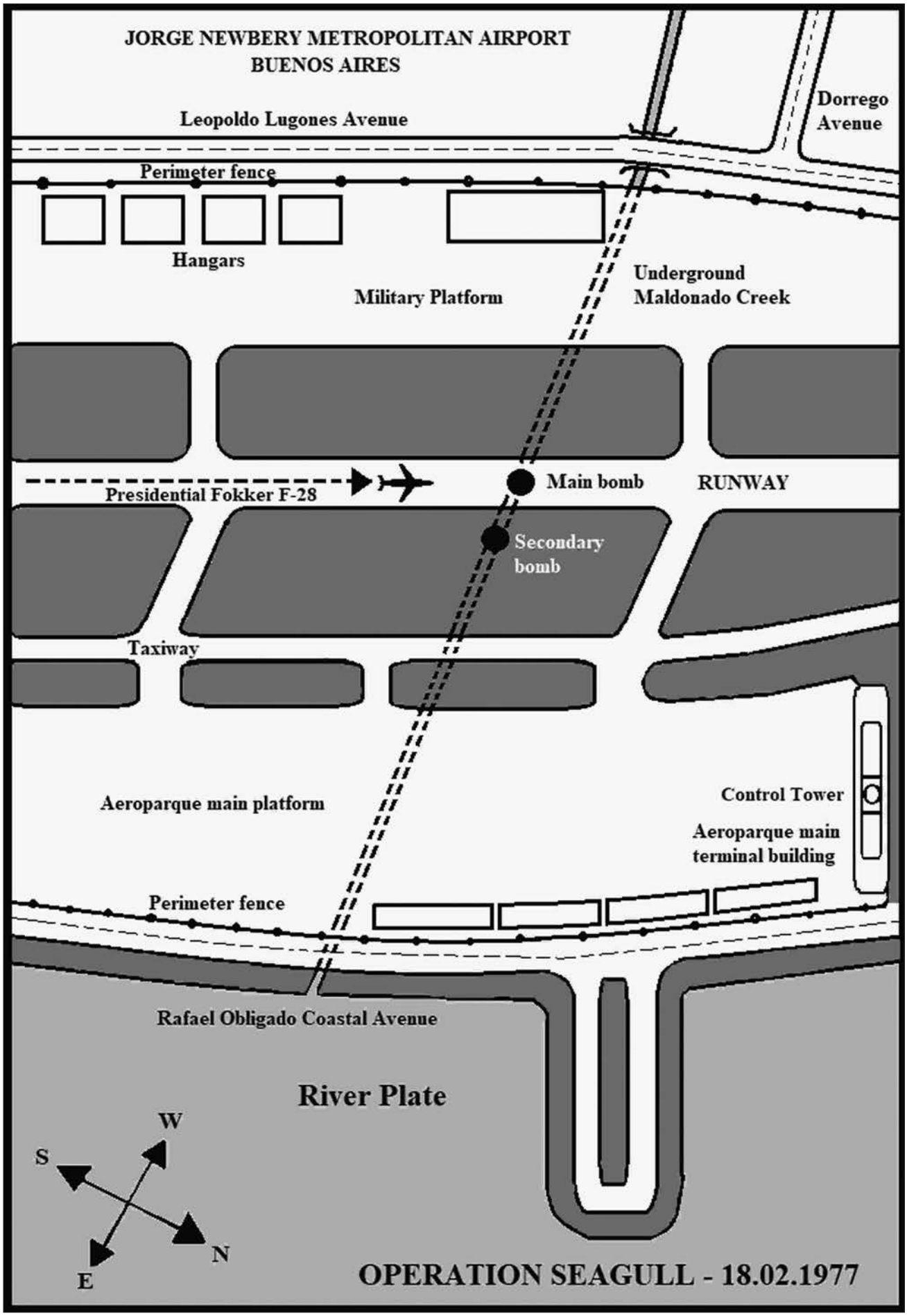
Contrary to popular belief, some 80 percent of the data obtained by Argentina's security forces on the members and plans of various subversive groups was gained through the seizure of vital documentation captured in guerrilla camps.[3] A serious tactical error on the part of the terrorist organisations was the data extracted from their own clandestine publications. In great detail and on more than one occasion, they even published the plans they intended to carry out. The publication of data should have been handled in utmost secrecy by the guerrillas, but their desire for political propaganda led them to make serious mistakes, with tragic consequences for themselves. Very little was ever obtained from the interrogation of captured insurgents, the vast majority of whom did not reveal anything of importance. Indeed, the majority of the guerrillas did not have access to any tactical plans, which were only ever handled by their leaders. Another very reliable source of information was the general civilian population, which showed strong support for the state security forces.

Detention Centres

The places where guerrilla fighters captured alive, members of their logistics chains and many sympathisers were kept between 1974 and 1983 were labelled by human rights organisations as 'clandestine detention centres'. Most of these detention centres (DCs) were located in military bases or military/police institutions, which had to be adapted to house large numbers of prisoners, including Army, ARA, FAA, Naval Prefecture, Federal Police, Provincial Police and National Gendarmerie premises, penitentiaries, hospitals, public institutions or state-owned properties. They were also in private establishments, and in some cases even private homes and country houses. The number of DCs in each zone is detailed in Table 3.[4]

Table 3: Military Regime Detention Centres

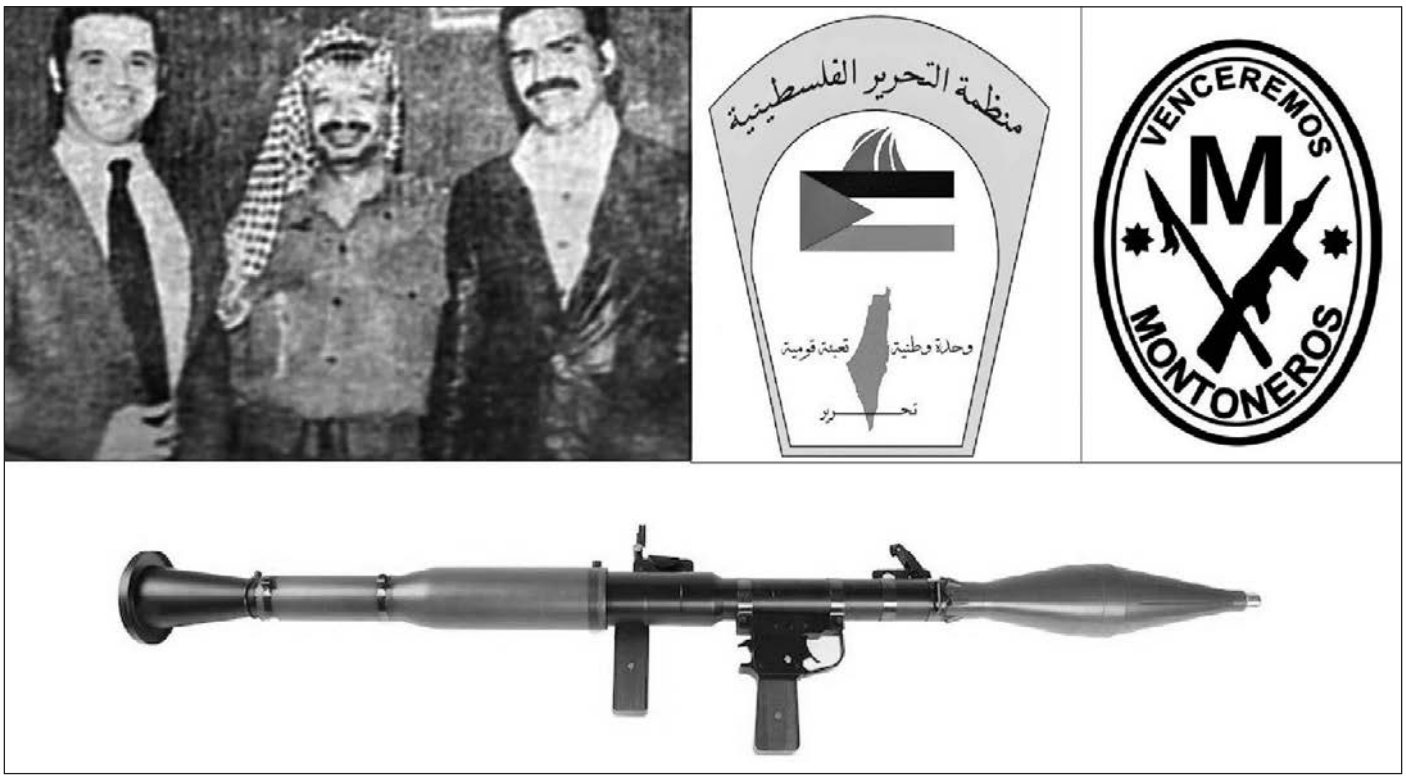
Zone	Jurisdiction	Number of DCs
1	I Army Corps	237
2	II Army Corps	173
3	III Army Corps	238
4	Command of Military Institutes	55
5	V Army Corps	59
TOTAL: 762 DC sites		



Location of the two charges placed under the runway by ERP explosives specialist Eduardo Miguel Streger. (Map by author)

ERP explosives specialist Eduardo Miguel Streger, known as *La Tía*. (Open Source)

Lieutenant General Roberto Viola, commander of the Argentine Army, decorating the relatives of soldiers who fell in the fight against subversion in October 1978. (Open Source)



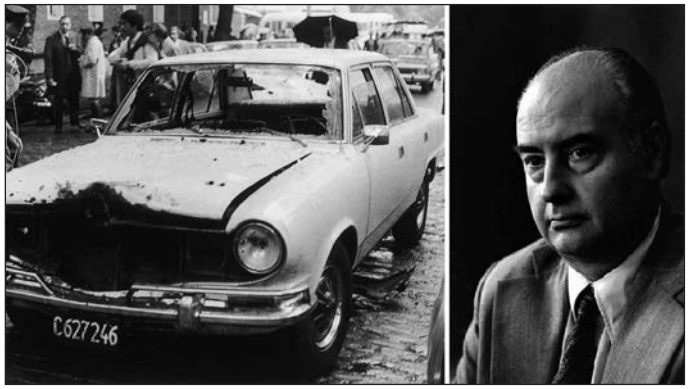
Meeting between Mario Firmenich and Fernando Vaca Narvaja from the *Montoneros* with the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat, in Lebanon in 1977 (above left). The crests of the PLO and *Montoneros* terrorist organisations (above right). An RPG-7 grenade launcher (below). (Open Source)

Khalil al-Wazir, known as Abu Jihad, leader of *Al Fatah* (left) and the emblem of *Al Fatah* (right). (Open source).

Cover of *Gente* magazine showing the damage caused by a terrorist bomb to the building where Admiral Lambruschini lived. Circled is the bedroom of Paula Lambruschini, the admiral's daughter (left). Paula Lambruschini, innocent victim of terrorist barbarism (right). (*Revista Gente*)

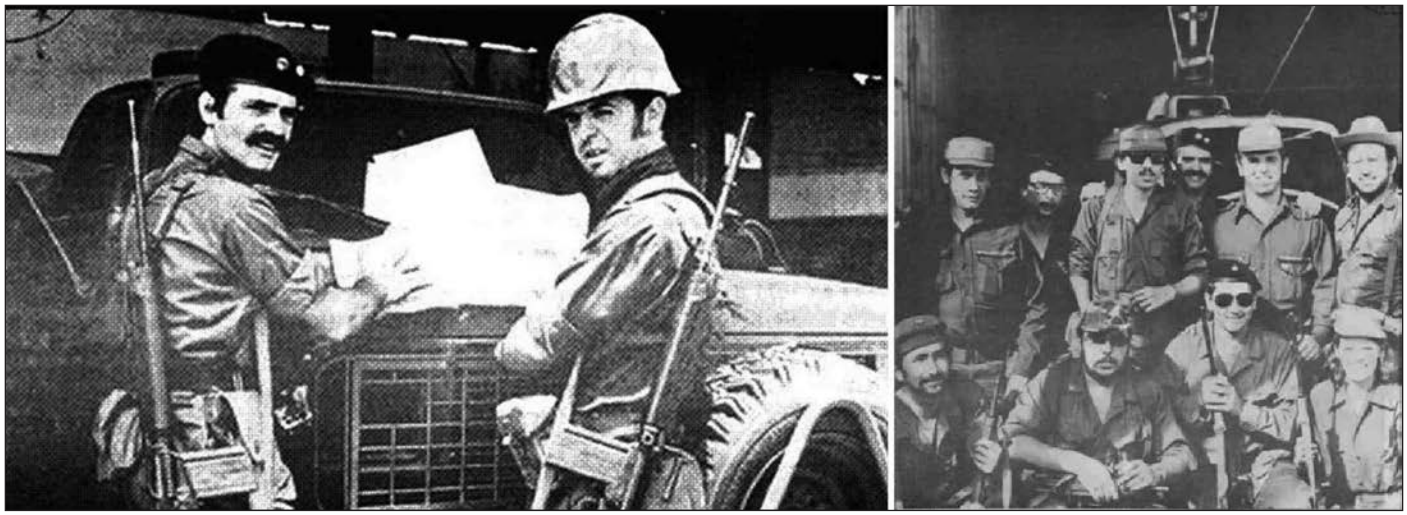
Daniel Passarella, captain of the Argentine soccer team, raises the World Cup in front of a very satisfied President Videla on 25 June 1978 at the Monumental Stadium of the River Plate Club (above). The emblem of the 1978 World Cup and its mascot, *Gauchito*. (Open Source)

Guillermo Walter Klein being carried on a stretcher by firefighters after the attack on his home by *Montoneros* (left). Firefighters rescue members of the Klein family from the rubble of their home, completely demolished by a bomb planted by *Montoneros* terrorists on 27 September 1979 (right). (Open Source)



Dr Juan Alemann, Secretary of the National Treasury (right). Dr Alemann's IKA-Renault Torino was attacked with submachine guns and an RPG-7 rocket (left). (Eduardo Longoni)

Businessman Francisco Soldati (left) and his driver were murdered by the *Montoneros* on 13 November 1979. Soldati's IKA-Renault Torino on fire next to the subversives' Ford pick-up truck (right). (Open Source)



With the main leaders of the *Montoneros* joining the *Sandinistas* in 1979 to overthrow Somoza's government in Nicaragua, they left their comrades in Argentina to fend for themselves. Vaca Narvaja and Firmenich in Managua, capital of Nicaragua, in 1979 (left). A group of *Sandinista* guerrillas with Firmenich and Vaca Narvaja in Managua in 1979 (right). (Open Source)

EPILOGUE

More than 40 years ago, the last military junta surrendered power in Argentina, since when the nation has had freely elected governments. The revolutionary war continued not through arms but through politics and mass media. From then on, human rights organisations, supported by relatives of those who were terrorist subversives and sympathisers, banded together in groups such as *Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), which adopted the spectacle of political theatre with ritualised and dramatic demonstrations, the Organization of American States' Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International and above all left-wing parties, movements and intellectuals. These groups pressured the democratic governments of Argentina to punish all those military, police and civilians who were responsible for the counterinsurgency fight. These organisations attempted to portray the terrorists as innocent victims of the evil, repressive and genocidal forces of the state. Since then, such groups have spoken of 'state terrorism', a 'genocidal state' and a 'repressive state' when they talk about the military regimes between 1976 and 1983.

The subversives were described as 'idealistic youths', even by General Perón himself, who had been pushing for a better, more democratic country, but in reality they wanted to impose a dictatorship of the proletariat in the best Cuban or Soviet style. In fact, they were plain and simple terrorists who had inaugurated their crimes in Argentina. These young people admired Marx, Lenin, Mao, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and the 'justice' they sought to implement involved shooting all dissidents, according to the pro-Soviet dictatorial model in Cuba. As has been related in this volume, these 'idealistic youths' robbed, kidnapped (even their own family members in some cases), hijacked, tortured, killed and bombed not only military and police targets, but also civilians, resulting in hundreds of deaths of innocent people who had nothing to do with the anti-subversive struggle. According to various official sources, 1,094 people were killed by the guerrillas, of whom 547 were military personnel from the Army, ARA and FAA, Police and Gendarmerie, including officers, NCOs and soldiers. The rest were civilians, businessmen, university professors, politicians, trade unionists, diplomatic officials, judges and guerrilla deserters, including women, some of them while pregnant, and even children and babies.[1] Furthermore, according to documented information held by the *Centro de Estudios Legales sobre el Terrorismo y sus Víctimas* (Centre for Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims, CELTYV), the

Various scenes from the protests carried out by the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires from 1977. (Open Source)

subversive organisations were responsible for a total of 17,380 victims, including not only fatalities but also those wounded and children left without parents. Despite all this, the democratic authorities, for legal reasons and under great international pressure, called the guerrillas simply 'subversive delinquents' rather than terrorists.

Another concept that has been raised by human rights organisations, relatives of insurgents and left-wing intellectuals was that this confrontation was not a war. However, the two main terrorist groups, the *Montoneros* and ERP, had military training, many kinds of weapons of war, military ranks, and even uniforms and codes of military justice. They used military tactics and received military training in countries such as Cuba and Lebanon, with the regime in Havana always ready to spread its armed revolution throughout Latin America. Besides, many ERP and *Montoneros* publications described the clashes with the state security forces as a war. Indeed, the ultimate goal of the subversives was the seizing of power in Argentina and the installation of a socialist homeland. For almost two years, all the necessary ingredients of war were in evidence: their own and enemy troops, a vanguard and rearguard, disputed territory, attack actions, advances and withdrawals, combat support through war supplies and communications, infiltration, spies and intelligence, health and transportation. Finally, there were the human and materiel consequences of all conflicts, deaths and injuries, the shooting down of aircraft, explosions, successes and mistakes, and victory and defeat.

It has been realistically estimated that around 7,300 subversives died in combat or were captured alive and later killed, including collaborators in its logistics system and sympathisers – nowhere near the 30,000 figure that human rights groups have claimed. What is more, over the years, the list of the 'disappeared' has been shrinking, it having been discovered that many of them were still alive and healthy. The last revision of the list revealed the number of 'disappeared' as being 6,348. Even ex-guerrillas have stated that the original figures were highly inflated.[2] Furthermore, the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo had denounced the systematic appropriation of guerrilla children by the military regime, giving a figure of 500 such cases. Investigations determined that there were actually only 12 of them, and those responsible were prosecuted through the courts. Most of the children of the guerrillas were handed over to their close relatives, and the rest to the authorities for adoption. Obviously, there were many abuses by the security forces against people who had nothing to do with the insurgents, which is unjustifiable, even during a war against guerrilla organisations.

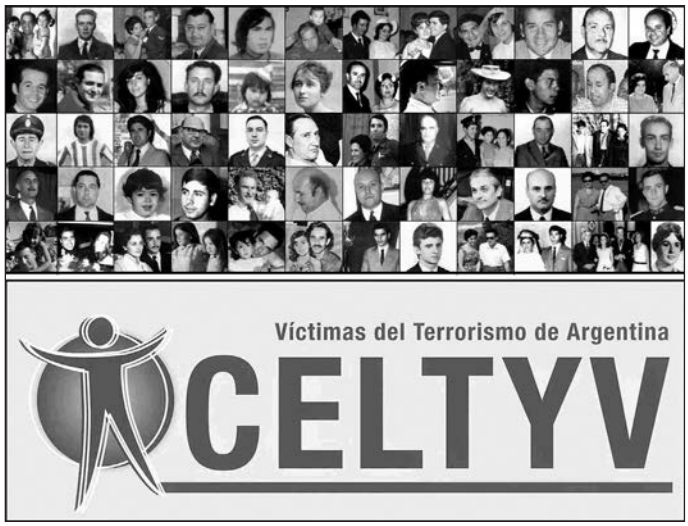
On 13 February 1984, Mario Firmenich, the main leader of the *Montoneros*, was arrested in Brazil after an extradition request was made by the constitutional government of Raúl Alfonsín. Four months later, he was extradited, tried and sentenced to 30 years in prison for murder and kidnapping, along with Fernando Vaca Narvaja and Roberto Perdía. During President Menem's administration, he was pardoned and regained his freedom. In 2001, Firmenich recognised that what happened in Argentina in the 1970s was a war, in which both sides had 'blood-stained hands'.[3] Vaca Narvaja went into exile in Mexico during the rule of the military regimes in Argentina. He returned to his homeland after being pardoned by President Menem in 1989. He had been sentenced by civil justice during the government of Raúl Alfonsín. Roberto Perdía also left Argentina during the time of the military juntas and went into exile in Spain. On 14 August 2003, he was arrested in a legal case related to the disappearance of *Montoneros* militants but was released at the end of October of that year. At the time of writing this volume, the three ex-guerrillas were still alive – Vaca Narvaja and Perdía living in Argentina, and Firmenich in Nicaragua.

As for Enrique Gorriarán Merlo of the ERP, he left Argentina in 1976 and joined the *Sandinistas* in Nicaragua. In 1980, an ERP commando group led by him killed the former President of Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, in Asunción, Paraguay. In January 1989, during the democratic government of Raúl Alfonsín, Gorriarán led the guerrilla group *Todos por la Patria* that tried to take over the Army's *La Tablada* Regiment, in the west of Greater Buenos Aires, an action in which 39 people were killed, including nine guerrillas. He was arrested in Mexico in 1995 and extradited to Argentina. After being sentenced to life imprisonment in 1996, Gorriarán, along with other detained ex-guerrillas, went on a hunger strike that lasted 162 days. He was released in 2003 through a presidential pardon from President Eduardo Duhalde. He died in 2006, aged 64.

Between 1962 and 1979, terrorist organisations committed 21,642 crimes in Argentina, including 1,501 murders, 1,748 kidnappings for extortion, 2,213 armed intimidations and the taking over of 45 military, police and security units, 20 towns, 80 factories, 22 social communication media outlets and five public sites. They committed 2,042 thefts of weapons, 551 of money, 589 of vehicles, 36 of explosives, 40 of documents, 17 of uniforms, 73 of medical supplies, 19 of communications equipment and 151 of various other materials. They also carried out 3,214 acts of armed subversive propaganda. It was between 1974 and 1975 that the highest rate of crimes committed by the guerrillas occurred, 6,762, during the rule of a democratic government freely elected by the people.[4]

In 1985, during the government of Dr Raúl Alfonsín of the UCR, criminal trials began against members of the military juntas that had governed Argentina between 1976 and 1983. On 15 December 1983, President Alfonsín sanctioned Decree No 158/83, which ordered the summary trial of nine of the 10 high-ranking military officers: Jorge Rafael Videla, Orlando Ramón Agosti, Emilio Eduardo Massera, Roberto Eduardo Viola, Omar Graffigna, Armando Lambruschini, Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, Basilio Lami Dozo and Jorge Anaya. The *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, CONADEP) was formed in order to investigate human rights violations during the military regimes. The commission sat for nine months and produced a 50,000-page document that registered 8,960 missing people.

All the former members of the military juntas were defended by private lawyers, with the exception of Jorge Rafael Videla, who was represented by an official defence attorney. The defences agreed in maintaining that the judiciary had no legal authority to try them,



The Centre for Legal Studies on Terrorism and its Victims (CELTYV) is a civil association created to preserve and disseminate the story of the victims of subversive organisations in Argentina in the 1970s. (Open Source)

as the annihilation decrees sanctioned by Isabel Perón and Ítalo Lúder during the last constitutional government overthrown in 1976 enabled them to execute the guerrillas. All the commanders who were put on trial assumed full responsibility for the orders they issued as well as for the actions of their subordinates against terrorism, first through the orders of a constitutional government and then by a *de facto* government. The defences of the military chiefs basically maintained that it had been a war, and that the acts revealed should be considered as the unavoidable circumstances of any war. Argentina was saved from communism, they said, and then those who won the war could not expect a fair trial, which was almost impossible due to national and international social pressure. The Argentine armed forces were greatly angered by the trial, viewing it as an attempt to destroy them. The military began to close ranks, with active officers visiting their comrades in jail. Meanwhile, many insurgent fighters who had indiscriminately murdered military and police officers were released, much to the outrage of the security forces.

The sentences were handed down on 9 December 1985, convicting five of the accused officers and acquitting four, as shown in Table 4.[5]

The court considered that the military juntas had developed a repressive system which included the commission of 'a large number of crimes of illegal deprivation of liberty, the application of torture and homicides'. However, as the military had technically been at war with the insurgents, such procedures were at the time considered legal, guaranteeing the impunity of those who had carried them out.

Fate of the Members of the Military Juntas[6]

First Military Junta (1976–1981)

Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla

Pardoned by President Menem in 1990 and released from prison. In 2006, a court declared the nullity of his pardon, later confirmed by the Supreme Court. With his pardon annulled, Videla was imprisoned again in 2008, and was sentenced in other cases in which he was accused of crimes against humanity. He died in jail in 2013, aged 87.

Admiral Eduardo Massera

Also pardoned by President Menem in 1990 and released from prison. Due to several accusations, he was under house arrest between 1998 and 2001. In 2005, he was declared mentally incapable due to a stroke suffered three years earlier, with pending lawsuits consequently closed. He died in 2010, aged 85.

Brigadier General Orlando Ramón Agosti

Served his sentence in Magdalena prison and regained his freedom in 1989. He was pardoned by President Menem in 1990. In 1993, he judicially requested the restitution of his military rank, a request that the justice system denied. He died in 1997, aged 73.

Second Military Junta (March–November 1981)

Lieutenant General Roberto Eduardo Viola

Pardoned by President Menem in 1990 and released from prison. He died in 1994, aged 69.

Admiral Armando Lambruschini

Pardoned by President Menem in 1990 and released from prison. Between 1998 and 2004, he was under house arrest. He died in 2004 at the age of 80.

Brigadier General Omar Graffigna

Arrested in 2013 and prosecuted for several illegal kidnappings and disappearances during the military regimes. In 2016, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison; in 2018, he received another sentence of 15 years for crimes committed in a clandestine detention centre. He died in 2019, aged 93.

Third Military Junta (1981–1982)

Lieutenant General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri

Sentenced to 12 years in prison and demotion in 1986 for crimes committed in conducting the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982. In 1989, he was pardoned by President Carlos Menem and released from prison, restoring his military rank. In 2002, he was arrested on suspicion of committing crimes against humanity during the last military regime; he died in 2003, aged 76, before going to trial while serving preventive detention at his home.

Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya

Sentenced to 14 years in prison and demotion in 1986 for crimes committed in conducting the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982. In 1989, he too was pardoned by President Carlos Menem and released from prison, restoring his military rank. In 2006, his arrest was ordered and he was accused of 266 cases of kidnapping and torture in the ESMA mega-case, but he managed to avoid arrest due to suffering a series of heart attacks. He died in freedom in 2008, at the age of 81.

Brigadier General Basilio Lami Dozo

Sentenced to eight years in prison and degradation in 1986 for crimes committed in conducting the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982. In 1989, he was pardoned by President Carlos Menem and released from prison, restoring his military rank. He died in freedom in 2017, at the age of 88.

Lieutenant General Cristino Nicolaides

Despite being part of the third military junta as an interim member, he was not accused by President Alfonsín. He was prosecuted in 1985 but this was dismissed by application of the Due Obedience Law of 1986. In 1989, he was also pardoned by President Menem. In 2007, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison for the kidnapping and

TABLE 4: Sentences for members of the military juntas in 1985	
Officer	**Sentence**
Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla	Life imprisonment with dismissal
Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera	Life imprisonment with dismissal
Brigadier General Orlando Ramón Agosti	4 years and 6 months in prison with dismissal
Lieutenant General Roberto Eduardo Viola	17 years in prison with dismissal
Admiral Armando Lambruschini	8 years in prison with dismissal
Brigadier General Omar Graffigna	Acquitted
Lieutenant General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri	Acquitted
Admiral Jorge Anaya	Acquitted
Lieutenant General Basilio Lami Dozo	Acquitted

disappearance of people during Operation Counteroffensive. He died in 2011, aged 88, while serving house arrest pending several trials.

Fourth Military Junta (1982–1983)

The members of the fourth military junta were not accused by Alfonsín, so were not prosecuted in the trial of the juntas. However, they were included in other trials carried out later.

Lieutenant General Reynaldo Bignone

Prosecuted for kidnappings, torture and murders committed during his command of the Campo de Mayo detention centre. However, before being sentenced he was released due to the Due Obedience laws in 1986. He was also tried for the destruction of documents of the repression before ending his last *de facto* government and remained detained from July 1989 until he was pardoned by President Carlos Menem in October of that year. In 1999, after the reopening of the cases for kidnapping minors, Bignone was brought back to justice. Up to August 2016, he was sentenced seven times for crimes against humanity, receiving 25 years in prison in 2010, life imprisonment in 2011, 15 years in 2012, life imprisonment again in 2013, 23 years in 2014 and 20 years in 2016. He died in 2018, aged 90.

Admiral Rubén Oscar Franco

Sentenced by a tribunal to 25 years in prison in 2014 for 31 cases of child abduction, but the sentence had not yet been finalised in 2023 due to the unprecedented delay of the Supreme Court. At the time of writing, he was still alive, aged 96.

Brigadier General Augusto Jorge Hughes

Although investigated for the disappearance of people during the military regime, he was never charged, dying in 1993 at the age of 62.

Numerous lower-ranking officers of the armed forces and police have also been arrested, tried and sentenced over the years. Between 2006 and 2017, various courts in Argentina handed down 941 sentences for 'crimes against humanity'.

The long list of alleged victims of the military dictatorship or their relatives, around 7,400 people, have benefited from millions of dollars from the state as compensation for the damage suffered. Unfortunately, the victims of the guerrillas and their families have not received the same treatment. In the last 40 years, Argentine society has only heard one side of the story, with the other being hidden from it, on purpose, with the result that the insurgents were lauded as innocent victims of a genocidal state. Hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been published on supposed state terrorism during the military regimes. In contrast, few publications have covered the other side of the dark history of Argentina's terrorist organisations.

Finally, as an irony of fate, a so-called 'Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism, with the names of the disappeared and murdered' has been erected in the *Parque de la Memoria* (Memory Park), on the *Avenida Costanera Norte* (North Coastal Avenue) in the city of Buenos Aires, in front of Río de la Plata. Most of the names on the monument correspond to people who belonged to terrorist groups in the 1970s, whose actions have been extensively described in this volume. Out of a total of 30,000 plaques, 8,751 names are registered on the monument corresponding to the period 1969–1983. The monument was inaugurated on 7 November 2007 during the presidency of the Justicialist (Perónist) Néstor Kirchner. Should there also be a monument to the victims of the guerrillas? Maybe now there should…

Montoneros leader Firmenich was arrested in Brazil in 1984 and extradited to Argentina (left). The leader of the ERP, Gorriarán Merlo, was arrested in Mexico in 1995, also thereafter being extradited to Argentina (right). (Open Source)

Members of the first military junta: from left to right, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla (President), Admiral Emilio Massera and Brigadier General Orlando Agosti. (Open Source)

Members of the second military junta: from left to right, Lieutenant General Roberto Eduardo Viola (President), Admiral Armando Lambruschini and Brigadier General Omar Graffigna. (Open Source)

Members of the fourth and last military junta: from left to right, Lieutenant General Reynaldo Bignone (President), Admiral Rubén Oscar Franco and Brigadier General Augusto Jorge Hughes. (Open Source)

Members of the third military junta: from left to right, Lieutenant General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (President), Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya, Brigadier General Basilio Lami Dozo and interim member Lieutenant General Cristino Nicolaides. (Open Source)

Two sides of the same story: Jorge Rafael Videla, in his cell at the Campo de Mayo Military Garrison in 2011. He would die in prison two years later (left) (from *Disposición Final* by Ceferino Reato, used with permission). Former *Montoneros* leader Mario Firmenich recently embraced Nicaraguan dictator Daniel Ortega. Firmenich still lives in freedom in Nicaragua (right). (Open Source)

Members of the military juntas in the trial chamber in 1985. Some of the accused were still wearing their military uniform (above). Judges and prosecutors of the trial of the military juntas (below). Admirals Lambruschini and Massera, Lieutenant General Videla and Brigadier General Graffigna during the trial (right). (Open Source)

Monument to the victims of state terrorism in the *Parque de la Memoria* in Buenos Aires. (Blmurch)

APPENDICES

Table 5: Argentine Armed Forces ranks (officers)[1]		
Argentine Army	**Argentine Navy**	**Argentine Air Force**
Teniente General (Lieutenant General)	*Almirante* (Admiral)	*Brigadier General* (Brigadier General)
General de División (Major General)	*Vicealmirante* (Vice Admiral)	*Brigadier Mayor* (Brigadier Major)
General de Brigada (Brigadier General)	*Contraalmirante* (Rear Admiral)	*Brigadier* (Brigadier)
Coronel Mayor (Colonel Major)	*Comodoro de Marina* (Commodore of the Navy)	*Comodoro Mayor* (Commodore Major)
Coronel (Colonel)	*Capitán de Navío* (Captain)	*Comodoro* (Commodore)
Teniente Coronel (Lieutenant Colonel)	*Capitán de Fragata* (Frigate Captain)	*Vicecomodoro* (Vice Commodore)
Mayor (Major)	*Capitán de Corbeta* (Corvette Captain)	*Mayor* (Major)
Capitán (Captain)	*Teniente de Navío* (Ship Lieutenant)	*Capitán* (Captain)
Teniente Primero (1st Lieutenant)	*Teniente de Fragata* (Frigate Lieutenant)	*Primer Teniente* (1st Lieutenant)
Teniente (Lieutenant)	*Teniente de Corbeta* (Corvette Lieutenant)	*Teniente* (Lieutenant)
Subteniente (Sub Lieutenant)	*Guardiamarina* (Midshipman)	*Alférez* (Ensign)

Table 6: Argentine Armed Forces ranks (NCOs)[2]		
Argentine Army	**Argentine Navy**	**Argentine Air Force**
Sub Oficial Mayor (Chief Warrant Officer)	*Sub Oficial Mayor* (Master Chief Petty Officer)	*Sub Oficial Mayor* (Chief Warrant Officer)
Sub Oficial Principal (Deputy Chief Officer)	*Sub Oficial Principal* (Deputy Chief Officer)	*Sub Oficial Principal* (Deputy Chief Officer)
Sargento Ayudante (Assistant Sergeant)	*Sub Oficial Primero* (Chief Warrant Officer)	*Sub Oficial Ayudante* (Assistant Chief Officer)
Sargento Primero (1st Sergeant)	*Sub Oficial Segundo* (2nd Chief Warrant Officer)	*Sub Oficial Auxiliar* (Auxiliary Chief Officer)
Sargento (Sergeant)	*Cabo Principal* (Chief Corporal)	*Cabo Principal* (Chief Corporal)
Cabo Primero (1st Corporal)	*Cabo Primero* (1st Corporal)	*Cabo Primero* (1st Corporal)
Cabo (Corporal)	*Cabo Segundo* (2nd Corporal)	*Cabo Segundo* (2nd Corporal)

Table 7: Argentine Armed Forces ranks (enlisted troops)[3]		
Argentine Army	**Argentine Navy**	**Argentine Air Force**
Cadete (Cadet)	*Cadete* (Cadet)	*Cadete* (Cadet)
Aspirante (Aspirant)	*Aspirante* (Aspirant)	*Aspirante* (Aspirant)
Dragoneante (Dragoneant)	*Dragoneante* (Dragoneant)	*Dragoneante* (Dragoneant)
Soldado (Soldier)	*Conscripto* (Conscript)	*Soldado* (Soldier)

Table 8: Argentine Coast Guard ranks[4]	
Officers	**NCOs**
Prefecto General (General Prefect)	*Ayudante Mayor* (Senior Assistant)
Prefecto Mayor (Senior Prefect)	*Ayudante Principal* (Chief Assistant)
Prefecto Principal (Chief Prefect)	*Ayudante de Primera* (1st Assistant)
Prefecto (Prefect)	*Ayudante de Segunda* (2nd Assistant)
Sub Prefecto (Deputy Prefect)	*Ayudante de Tercera* (3rd Assistant)
Oficial Principal (Chief Officer)	*Cabo Primero* (1st Corporal)
Oficial Auxiliar (Auxiliary Officer)	*Cabo Segundo* (2nd Corporal)
Oficial Ayudante (Assistant Officer)	*Marinero* (Sailor)

Table 9: Argentine National Gendarmerie ranks[5]	
Officers	**NCOs**
Comandante General (General Commander)	*Sub Oficial Mayor* (Chief Warrant Officer)
Comandante Mayor (Senior Commander)	*Sub Oficial Principal* (Deputy Chief Officer)
Comandante Principal (Main Commander)	*Sargento Ayudante* (Assistant Sergeant)
Segundo Comandante (2nd Commander)	*Sargento Primero* (1st Sergeant)
Primer Alférez (1st Ensign)	*Sargento* (Sergeant)
Alférez (Ensign)	*Cabo Primero* (1st Corporal)
Subalférez (Deputy Ensign)	*Cabo* (Corporal)
Cadete (Cadet)	*Aspirante a Sub Oficial* (NCO Aspirant)
-	*Gendarme* (Gendarme)
-	*Gendarme de Segunda* (Gendarme 2nd Class)

Table 10: Argentine Federal Police ranks[6]	
Officers	**NCOs**
Comisario General (General Commissioner)	*Sub Oficial Mayor* (Chief Warrant Officer)
Comisario Mayor (Senior Commissioner)	*Sub Oficial Auxiliar* (Assistant Warrant Officer)
Comisario Inspector (Inspector Commissioner)	*Sub Oficial Escribiente* (NCO)
Comisario (Commissioner)	*Sargento Primero* (1st Sergeant)
Sub Comisario (Deputy Commissioner)	*Sargento* (Sergeant)
Principal (Principal)	*Cabo Primero* (1st Corporal)

Inspector (Inspector)	*Cabo* (Corporal)
Sub Inspector (Deputy Inspector)	*Agente* (Agent)
Ayudante (Assistant)	*Aspirante* (NCO Aspirant)
-	*Cadete* (Cadet)

Table 11: Guerrilla organisation ranks

ERP[7]		*Montoneros*[8]
Officers, NCO & effectives	Rank Insignia	Officers & Troops
Comandante (Commander)	One red star	*Comandante* (Commander)
Capitán (Captain)	One yellow star	*Oficial Superior* (Senior Officer)
Teniente (Lieutenant)	Two black stars	*Oficial Mayor* (Major Officer)
Sargento (Sergeant)	One black star	*Oficial Primero* (1st Officer)
Combatiente (Combatant)	No rank insignia	*Oficial Segundo* (2nd Officer)
-	-	*Oficial* (Officer)
-	-	*Aspirante a Oficial* (Aspirant Officer)
-	-	*Soldado* (Soldier)
-	-	*Miliciano* (Militiaman)

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Chapter 2

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The campaign against anti-government and revolutionary groups in Argentina during the 1970s has become infamous for the notorious methods employed by government forces to ruthlessly suppress any form of opposition, and terms such as 'dirty war' and 'disappeared' have been added to the global lexicon as a result. Volume 2 of *Operativo Independencia* offers a military history of this insurgency and the campaign to suppress it, the telling of which to date has been highly politicised. Far from being only a movement of radical students and intellectuals, the opposition to Argentina's government included armed organisations that engaged in a bloody, if ineffective and ultimately futile, campaign of murder to achieve its aims. While Isabel Martínez de Perón authorised the launch of *Operativo Independencia* to suppress the armed insurgency, failure to take firm control of Argentina would lead to her overthrow by her own generals who would go on to establish a series of military juntas to rule Argentina until the return of democracy in the aftermath of the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982.

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